

**Editors: Liudas Zdanavičius and Matthew Czekaj**

Foreword by Glen E. Howard and Jānis Bērziņš

# **Russia's Zapad 2013 Military Exercise**

LESSONS FOR BALTIC REGIONAL SECURITY



The JAMESTOWN  
FOUNDATION



# Russia's Zapad 2013

## Military Exercise

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The Jamestown Foundation  
Washington, DC



National Defence Academy of Latvia  
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# Foreword

As the contents of this booklet reveal, Zapad 2013 was no simple military drill. The lessons learned from this multi-faceted exercise continue to be debated and assessed by analysts and experts because of the sheer scale and complexity of the forces involved. The two principal participants in the exercises—Russia and Belarus—contributed more than 75,000 men, who were engaged in simulated operations in the air, on land and at sea. The deployment of these forces and the execution of the exercises took place on a theater-wide level, in close proximity to the Baltic states. As such, Zapad 2013 essentially targeted the military frontiers of NATO members and partners, from Poland to the eastern Baltic Sea.

Due to a collaborative effort between The Jamestown Foundation and the Center for Security and Strategic Research of the National Defense Academy of Latvia, we are delighted to have facilitated the creation of the following monograph, made possible by the hard work of the two principal editors, Liudas Zdanavičius and Matthew Czekaj, who recruited the contributors and edited the various essays making up the contents to this publication. The analysis presented here is rare and difficult to find elsewhere; a deeper level of understanding of this complex topic has mostly been limited to a small, devoted group of military analysts in the West who closely monitor Russian military developments. The contributors to this booklet are all leading experts on the region, and they analyze Zapad 2013 from many different contexts, offering the reader an interpretation from a variety of perspectives. Latvian, Finnish and Swedish viewpoints are all represented here, as well as insights from two of the foremost authorities in the United States on the Russian military.

Since Zapad 2013 took place, the importance of understanding the aims of this vast exercise has taken on greater importance following the Russian annexation of Crimea, in February 2014, and Moscow's intervention and occupation of eastern Ukraine later that year. Policymakers and planners at NATO were forced to recalibrate their views about the Baltic region following these events. A baseline assessment of Zapad 2013 is thus crucial because it can serve as an important reference tool for when the next region-wide

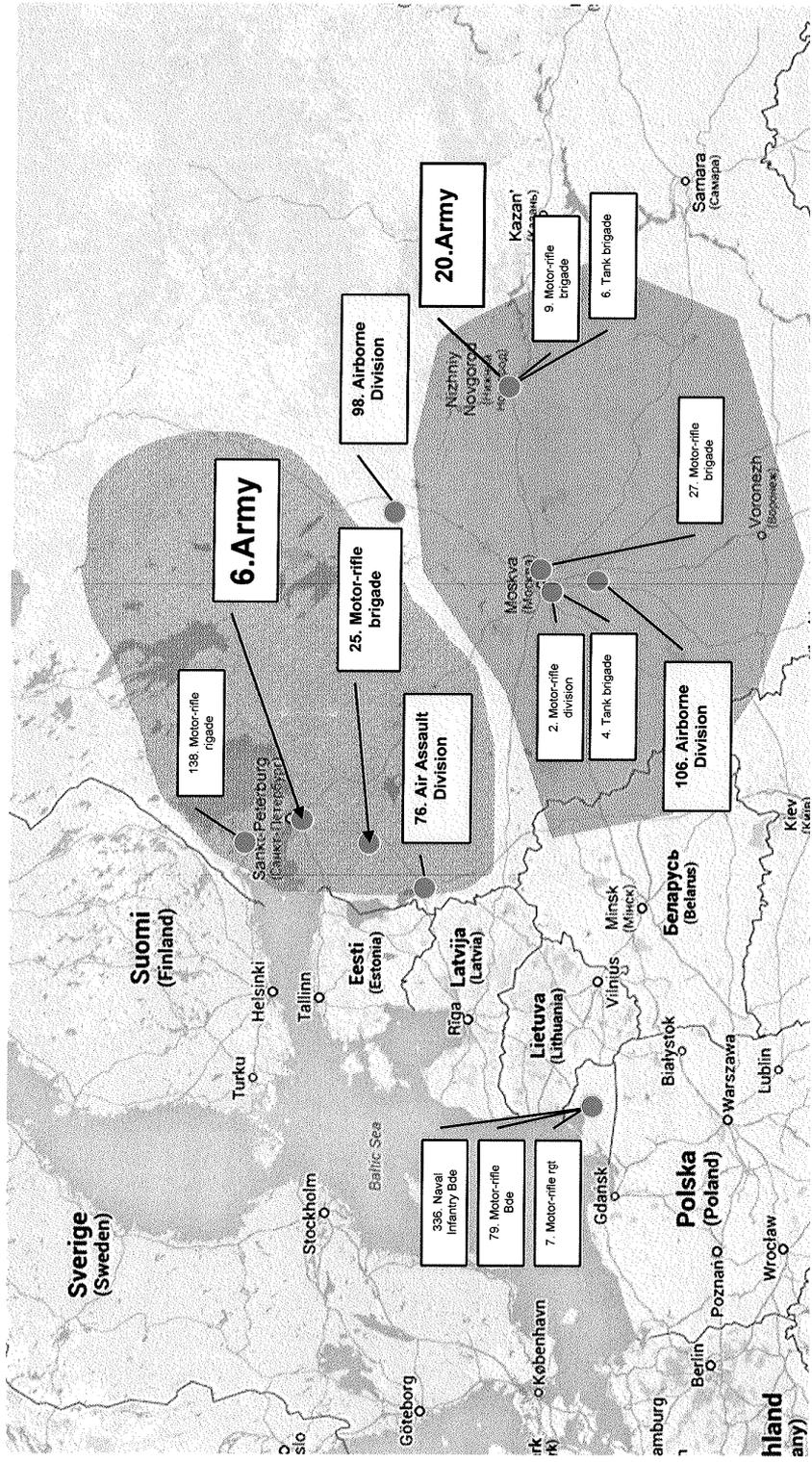
military exercise is organized by Moscow in the not-so distant future. As a serious military power in the Baltic, Russia's capabilities and intentions are critically important to understand for the NATO alliance, which itself is now becoming more deeply involved in the region. Particularly over the past two years or so, the North Atlantic Alliance has been focusing its resources there in order to build up the capabilities necessary to uphold Article 5 commitments to its member states. Rotations of American and NATO troops into the Baltics and the pre-deployment of materiel in the region indicate that the West has understood the need for greater urgency to respond to the conventional and non-linear threat to European security posed by Russian forces. Behind this changing strategic environment there are important lessons for Baltic security in the Zapad 2013 military exercise. And we believe the contents of this study will help the policymaking community understand the inherent threats both in a military context and as a form of strategic communication.

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December 7, 2015  
Washington, DC

# Main Zapad 2013 Training Areas (In Dark Gray)



Courtesy of Pauli Järvenpää

# Introduction

Only a few weeks before this report was being finalized, Russia and Belarus carried out their principal joint military exercise of the year. Between September 10 and 16, the two countries conducted the Union Shield 2015 exercise in Russia's Leningrad and Pskov regions. A continuation of the exercise training schedule begun in 2009, the westward-facing joint Russian-Belarusian exercises alternatively take on the name "Zapad" ("West") when occurring mainly on Belarusian territory, and "Union Shield" when the majority of activities are held on Russian soil.

Officially, Union Shield 2015 involved over 8,000 troops, more than 400 vehicles, around 100 tanks, up to 80 military aircraft, including Mi-8, Mi-24 and Ka-52 helicopters, as well as Su-24, Su-25 and Su-27 jets. The exercise simulated a variety of combat situations, but its stated goal was to prepare for conducting joint special operations, focusing on carrying out joint mobile defense with a transition to offensive actions.

In many ways, Union Shield 2015 was overshadowed by the largest Russian military exercise of this year, Tsentr ("Center") 2015, which was carried out in late September across central and southern Russia. Nonetheless, Union Shield was an important extension to what may have been one of the most consequential, Europe-focused Russian regional exercises of the past several years—Zapad 2013. This massive, two-year-old exercise remains pertinent to study and understand because of what it reveals about Russian capabilities along the border with NATO, how Russia trains its forces and understands its threat environment, as well as the way in which Moscow uses such large-scale exercises as a smoke-screen to obscure the deployment of its Armed Forces to regional hotspots beyond Russian borders. These are important lessons to learn and internalize not only against the background of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in early 2014, following the Zapad 2013 exercises, but also with a view to Russia's partially concealed buildup in Syria this fall, on the heels of the Tsentr 2015 maneuvers. Almost certainly, Moscow will utilize such a *modus operandi* in future conflicts as well.

Zapad 2013 was a wide-scale military exercise carried out by the Russian and Belarusian military forces in September 2013. The joint maneuvers, which were held in Belarus and western Russia, simulated an incursion by foreign-backed “terrorist” groups originating from the Baltic States. This exercise—involving tens of thousands of personnel and hundreds of vehicles and pieces of military equipment—received a great deal of attention in the Baltic States, Poland and Finland, but passed almost unnoticed in the West.

In light of the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, which began in early 2014, Russia’s defense posture, military capabilities, state of readiness and military buildup are once again a focus of attention for Western decision makers and the wider policy and academic community. The Russian military demonstrated its increased capabilities in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. And in recent years, the country has also greatly boosted its military activity in the wider Baltic Sea region through such actions as large-scale snap “readiness checks” and frequent, often provocative air and naval probes near NATO’s borders. Regular violations of the Baltic States’ airspace by Russian fighters and bombers, as well as naval exercises in the vicinity of European countries’ territorial waters were also key components of Russia’s enhanced “force projection” demonstrations.

Within this larger regional security context, a close analysis of the Zapad 2013 exercise is valuable because of what it reveals about the state of the Russian armed forces and Moscow’s overall military strategy. In particular, one can begin to ask whether Russia may have started preparing for the actions in Ukraine and military confrontation with the West as early as autumn 2013. And maybe even more importantly, analysis of Zapad 2013 can shed light on how Russia sees potential future military conflict in the Western direction.

This booklet—*Russia’s Zapad 2013 Exercise: Lessons for Baltic Regional Security*—analyzes in deep and well-researched detail different aspects of Zapad 2013 and how this exercise relates to Russia’s military posture and the security environment in Europe’s East. The included authors represent a broad range of viewpoints, spanning the United States, the Nordic countries and the Baltic States, as well as government, military and academia. This assembled cross-section of analytical defense and security expertise thus provides an unmatched and comprehensive review of a Russian military

exercise with direct implications for NATO defense planning, but which nonetheless passed by with limited commentary in the United States and many of the Alliance's Western European members.

*Russia's Zapad 2013 Exercise* is divided into five thematically based chapters:

The first chapter, written by long-time Soviet and Russian military analyst Dr. Stephen Blank, provides a broad overview of the Zapad 2013 exercise as well as lists some of its most strategically relevant elements. In particular, he notes how the exercise combines a simulated counter-terrorism operation with large-scale conventional theater war.

The second chapter, by Dr. Peter A. Mattsson and Jörgen Elfving, delves deeper into the details of Zapad 2013, seeking not only to quantify the exercise based on available open-source data but also to describe its role in the more general picture of Russian military reform.

Mattsson and Elfving's chapter is followed by a contribution from Dr. Pauli Järvenpää. His chapter closely analyzes the impact of the Zapad exercise on the security situation in the wider Baltic region. He also offers a Finnish perspective on the modernization gains achieved by the Russian armed forces in recent years, as well as the respective areas where these forces are trying to make improvements to their strategic shortcomings.

The ensuing chapter, by Ieva Bērziņa, analyses another important aspect of the Zapad 2013 exercise—the messaging, which he terms “strategic communication,” used by the Russian and Belarusian officials. This strategic communication took various forms depending on the audience and objective, ranging from encouraging pride for the Armed Forces in the local population, to reassuring Western European countries, to intimidating Russia's neighbors in Central and Eastern Europe.

And the final chapter in this booklet, written by military historian Dr. Jacob W. Kipp places Zapad 2013 within a detailed introduction to the history of Russian military exercises—from the tsarist era until the present day. Importantly, Dr. Kipp's chapter also analyzes the regular role of large-scale exercises in masking cases of Russian military build ups prior to armed actions

within its neighborhood—from interventions in the Soviet Bloc to Russia’s more recent invasions of Georgia and Ukraine.

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November 30, 2015

Washington, DC

# Key Findings

By delving into the details surrounding Russia's Zapad 2013 exercise, this booklet presents important analytical insights into the development, capabilities and operational strategy of the Russian military. Among this study's most important key findings:

- Russia demonstrated the use of different methods of information influence in order to achieve its goals during Zapad 2013. Moscow claimed it was providing its Western partners with extensive details pertaining to the exercise, but at the same time angrily rebuked any attempts by the Baltic States or Poland to obtain additional information regarding the large-scale joint Russian-Belarusian maneuvers on NATO's eastern borders.
- Moscow sought to mask the real size of the Zapad 2013 exercises by presenting it as merely an analogue to NATO's earlier exercise "Steadfast Jazz 2013." In reality, even the official numbers of soldiers who reportedly participated in the exercises was two times larger than the West's joint drills (12,500 versus 6,500 in "Steadfast Jazz"). When summing up all the components of the exercise, including those not officially included in Zapad 2013 (such as Russian snap "readiness checks," parallel exercises of the Northern fleet, etc.) the real number of participants was at least three times higher than Moscow's official declarations.
- Zapad 2013's official scenario depicted joint military responses by Russian and Belarusian forces to invading "terrorist" groups that had the support of unnamed foreign countries. Almost certainly, Zapad 2013 simulated an offensive operation against Poland and the Baltic States. Assuming this is correct, the overall exercise's biggest emphasis, therefore, was devoted to practicing cutting off (with the use of the Baltic Sea fleet) potential reinforcements from neighboring NATO forces.

- Zapad 2013 can be seen as part of Russia’s goal of demonstrating its military dominance in the region. This exercise was used in similar ways as other Russian force-projection measures (including air and sea provocations). A particular illustration of such measures was the series of test firings of Iskander theater ballistic missiles during the exercise. And Russia’s force projection in the Baltic Sea region became even more prominent during 2014, when the frequency of incidents between Russian and NATO military aircraft increased threefold.
- Force demonstrations carried out by Russia concurrently with large-scale military exercises (including those sometimes referred to as “readiness checks”) were a vital aspect of Moscow’s tactics in Ukraine in early 2014 (both during the takeover of Crimea and later in its involvement in the Donbas region). Russian exercises acted as a demonstration of the seriousness of Russian military might—which could be used in case of more active Ukrainian military resistance. And these large-scale exercises also served as a means to obscure the movement of Russian units into the conflict zone.
- Zapad 2013 demonstrated the close military cooperation between Belarus and Russia. However, the participation of other CSTO members was clearly more or less symbolic.
- During the Zapad 2013 exercise, the Russian defense establishment tested the concept of total war. Military units acted hand-in-hand with the FSB, interior ministry troops, police and even local officials. This improvement in the interoperability among military, security and civilian entities is a crucial aspect of how Russia believes “next generation warfare” will need to be fought.
- Contrary to Zapad 2009, the limited use of nuclear weapons was not simulated during Zapad 2013. This contradicts official Russian rhetoric and information warfare messages following the start of the Ukrainian crisis, in which President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials warned about Moscow’s resolve to respond to any perceived Western escalation with the limited use of nuclear weapons. However, at least at present, there are some indicators that Russia will not

consider the possibility of the wider use of nuclear weapons in its military doctrine.

# What Do the Zapad 2013 Exercises Reveal?

*Stephen Blank*

Summer through early fall is traditionally the main exercise season for Russia's armed forces, and 2013 was no different from preceding years. Russian exercises are important because they reveal where, against whom and in what form Russia is preparing to wage war. The seasonal military drills of 2013 culminated in late September with the Zapad ("West") 2013 exercises that encompassed several firing ranges and training areas in the Russian Federation and Belarus (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 26, 2013). Like its predecessor, Zapad 2009, this exercise was deliberately misnamed. As in 2009, it was called "Zapad" or "West" to confound foreign observers into underestimating its scope. But in fact, the September 20–26 drills stretched all the way from the Arctic to Voronezh and simultaneously involved all branches of Russia's armed forces—land, sea, air, air defense and airborne—special forces (Spetsnaz), the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Interior (VVMVD) in a "snap inspection," and even medical and army psychological personnel, not to mention the logistical and engineering forces, which took part in these simultaneous exercises (Strazh Baltiki, September 28, 2013; Zvezda TV, September 20, 2013; Foreign Broadcast Information Service–Central Eurasia [FBIS SOV], September 18, 20, 26, 28, 2013; Interfax-AVN Online, September 13, 18, 2013; Vo Slavu Rodiny Online, September 26, 2013).

As the press finally admitted, the Zapad 2013 exercises amounted to a comprehensive review of the command-and-control (C2) systems, the ability of the armed forces to complete combined forces operations (i.e. with the Belarusian military, including its Spetsnaz), as well as a thorough testing of the joint operations of Russia's armed forces where land, sea and air forces operated together simultaneously in a single operation. As a result, Russia could not have mobilized, transported, and deployed just 10,000 men, as some sources claimed. Rather the figure, according to unofficial Western estimates by individuals speaking off the record, must have been closer to 70,000. It should be noted in this context that Russia's ability to mobilize, transport, and deploy such large numbers points to considerable improvement in its armed

forces' capabilities, especially when compared to the relatively modest 6,000 troops that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mustered for its November 2013 Steadfast Jazz exercise in the Baltic—which was clearly a reply to Zapad 2013 (Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Belarus, FBIS SOV, September 23, 2013; Rzeczpospolita, October 1, 2013).

Russian claims that the purpose of the exercise was to test the effectiveness and reliability of the C2 reforms introduced since 2008 as well as to experiment with combined and joint operations based on those same reforms are true (FBIS SOV, October 3, 2013). But they do not represent the whole truth. Indeed, the maneuvers and drills conducted during Zapad 2013 reflected virtually the entire range of conceivable military operations except for nuclear strikes, which Russia had practiced in the Zapad 2009 and Vostok (“East”) 2010 exercises. The absence of a nuclear element in Zapad 2013 may reflect concern over the unfavorable publicity generated by the reports of a simulated nuclear strike on Warsaw in Zapad 2009. Nevertheless, Russian nuclear weapons remain a priority item in Moscow’s defense procurement budget. Their absence from this year’s drills may also reflect Russian interest and greater confidence in using precision-strike long-range ballistic missiles as a deterrent, along with long-range strike forces as those systems come on line. Certainly President Vladimir Putin is on record pushing for making such forces a priority in the Russian military (VES Online, September 24, 2013; FBIS SOV, September 24, 28, 2013; Na Strazhe Rodiny, September 28, 2013; Kremlin.ru, September 19, 2013).

At the conventional level, Zapad 2013 featured search and rescue, amphibious landing and anti-landing operations, air and ground strikes on enemy targets, anti-submarine warfare, missile strikes with long-range precision strike assets, airborne and air assault operations, and so on across the entire expanse from the Arctic to Voronezh. According to reports, the training scenario featured an attack and/or landing by “Baltic terrorists” targeting Belarus in which these forces held out despite numerous assaults by the Russo-Belarusian defenders. The enemy forces then fled into cities, leading to urban operations to dislodge them—hence the integration of anti-terrorist and conventional operations. These “terrorists” conducted an amphibious landing on the Baltic Sea coast, employed Mi-24 helicopters, Su-25 and Su-30 strike aircraft, as well as conducted ship-to-shore fire from naval vessels of the Baltic Fleet (Izvestiya

Online, September 26, 2013; The Moscow Times, September 30, 2013; Krasnaya Zvezda Online, September 28, 2013; FBIS SOV, September 26, 28, 2013). Thus, these “terrorists” appear to have been a deliberately misnamed surrogate for NATO.

But the real scope of these operations did not end there. In Central Asia, a Russian-led multi-national exercise, Vzaimodeistiviye (“Mutual Action”), comprising forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) also took place at the same time (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 26, 2013). Furthermore, Russia carried out concurrent joint exercises with Mongolia. And immediately after Zapad 2013’s conclusion, a Pacific Fleet exercise in Russia’s Primorye (Maritime) Province went forward, sending clear signals to China (FBIS SOV, September 7, 13, 2013; Suvorovskiy Natisk, September 7, 2013).

In all these cases Moscow, or more specifically Chief of Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, contended that Russian forces were conducting nothing more than an anti-terrorism operation and had no specific enemy in mind. However, Polish, Baltic and Nordic observers all registered alarm about these operations because Zapad 2013—perhaps with the Libyan and Syrian examples in mind—folded anti-terrorist operations and urban warfare into a larger scenario that also embraced classic large-scale conventional theater operations involving combined and joint operations, missile strikes, and so on. Indeed, the participation of VVMVD forces suggested not just an anti-terrorist urban operation, but a broader effort to conduct a large-scale mobilization of the total armed forces at the government’s disposal: i.e. a large-scale war that included a terrorist scenario, as in the Middle Eastern conflicts cited above. In fact, Gerasimov emphasized that “[the Russian military] worked on the interoperability of all the branches and combat arms and also of the other agencies mobilized in the exercise” (Interfax-AVN Online, FBIS SOV, September 19, 27, 2013). The crowning evidence for this assertion, and an element of the exercise that did not receive much press, is the fact that as part of Zapad 2013, a mobilization of reservists in Leningrad and Nizhny Novgorod oblasts, as well as the energy, transport and interior ministries took place—a telltale sign of a large war scenario (Interfax-AVN Online, September 27, 2013; 47 News, September 20, 2013; FBIS SOV, September 20, 27, 2013).

On September 20–26, Russia carried out military exercises with Belarusian forces as part of Zapad 2013. Though the training scenario envisioned repelling an attack on Belarus by “terrorist” forces, Zapad 2013’s territorial scope, breadth of practiced operations, and the number of units and force types involved, suggested that Russia was practicing for a large-scale war against a conventional army.

In many ways, this large scale war scenario reflected the continuing hold of the dysfunctional and discredited Soviet military model on the Russian military-political mind. As Karl Marx famously observed, “the dead hand of all the generations of the past weighs like a nightmare upon the brain of the living”—so it is with the Russian military and political leadership. Moscow argued that the Zapad 2013 exercises represented a riposte to terrorists. But again, a little-publicized fact is that these simulated “terrorists” were apparently Balts, intent on mounting operations in Belarus against that government and on behalf of their supposedly oppressed ethnic kinsmen. Moreover, the scope of the operation suggests that Moscow still cannot conceive of carrying out anti-terrorism or counter-insurgency operations in terms other than those of larger-scale conventional theater scenarios. In and of itself, that point is reminiscent of Soviet counter-insurgency operations, for example in Afghanistan.

Beyond those points, it is also clear that Russia regards NATO as an enemy, despite concurrent cooperation with it. Indeed, just before these exercises, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told the Valdai Club forum that NATO is an enemy because of its pursuit of a comprehensive ballistic missile defense system and the Alliance’s continuing expansion (RIA Novosti, FBIS SOV, September 19, 2013). Missile defense, by Russian admission, will not represent a threat to Russia before 2020. Moreover, NATO has not accepted new members in years and no further enlargement is planned for the time being. These facts, coupled with NATO’s diminishing military strength in the face of budget austerity, called into question the seriousness of Russia’s stated threat assessments, particularly prior to the Russian aggression against Ukraine starting in 2014.

Not long prior to the Zapad 2013 exercise, Shoigu argued that Russia's defense ministry believes private and state-run businesses—such as transport and oil processing companies—should be mandated to hold reserves that could be used to supply army troops under extreme circumstances. Indeed, Zapad 2013 seems to have been conducted with those requests in mind because it revealed the total non-conformity of Russia's mobilization plans to the country's current capitalist economy. Evidently, Shoigu wishes to bring back the Soviet mobilization model despite the fact that it has long since been utterly discredited and is visibly and wholly dysfunctional. In fact, the defense minister explicitly compared the situation in late 2013 to the Soviet period, clearly lamenting the uncertainty of Russian transportation systems, the supplies of hydrocarbons and even hydroelectric power compared to the Soviet era (Moskovskiy Komsomolets Online, September 27, 2013; Interfax, September 30, 2013; FBIS SOV, September 27, 30, 2013).

Adding to this sense of illusion, Deputy Defense Minister Dmitry Rogozin, like his Tsarist and Soviet predecessors, critiqued the Russian finance ministry's assessment of the failure of the defense modernization program by claiming that the defense industrial sector is growing annually at 12–14 percent and that salaries are growing at 23–25 percent (Interfax, FBIS SOV, October 1, 2013). Nevertheless, even if the figures by Rogozin are correct, they imply that the Russian defense industry sector, like its Soviet predecessor, is value subtracting.

One cannot simply shrug off the Russian military's potential, however, or the intentions of the country's leaders. Russian legislation permits the president to deploy troops beyond Russia's borders to defend the honor and rights of Russian citizens—the same justification used against Georgia in 2008. Moreover, he can do so without any recourse to the Duma. In other words, the president is free, without any accountability whatsoever, to commit Russia to a war with its neighbors for reasons not unlike those rehearsed this year or in the Zapad 2009 exercise. Considering Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and the current threats against the independence, integrity and sovereignty of Lithuania, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Armenia, as well as Vladimir Putin's admission that the war in Georgia in 2008, including the use of separatists, was preplanned (Kremlin.ru, August 10, 2012), clearly European security cannot be taken for granted even if no war is currently in sight (Ryan

Maness and Brandon Valentino, “Russia and the Near Abroad: Applying a Risk Barometer for War,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, XXV, No. 2, 2012, pp. 125–148).

Though menaced by militant insurgencies in the North Caucasus and in the face of a—by many measures—still declining NATO, Russia nevertheless insists on refighting theater conventional, if not nuclear, war scenarios in Europe. The country’s military leaders openly claim that Russia is surrounded by enemies who aim to destroy the foundations of the state. They claim a strategic partnership with China while simultaneously rehearsing and conducting exercises against it (RT, July 14, 2013; see China Brief, September 12, 2013). However, the current leadership, like its forebears, has forgotten the lesson of excessive militarization of the economy and still invokes the Soviet model, which is now essentially a system of organized corruption that is dysfunctional to modern war. And like their predecessors, Russian leaders still hanker after the power to mobilize the entire economy during wartime. Nevertheless, this seeming delusion is little comfort to Russia’s neighbors and NATO’s members.

# Zapad 2013: A Multifaceted Exercise With Unique Ingredients

*Jörgen Elfyng and Peter A. Mattsson*

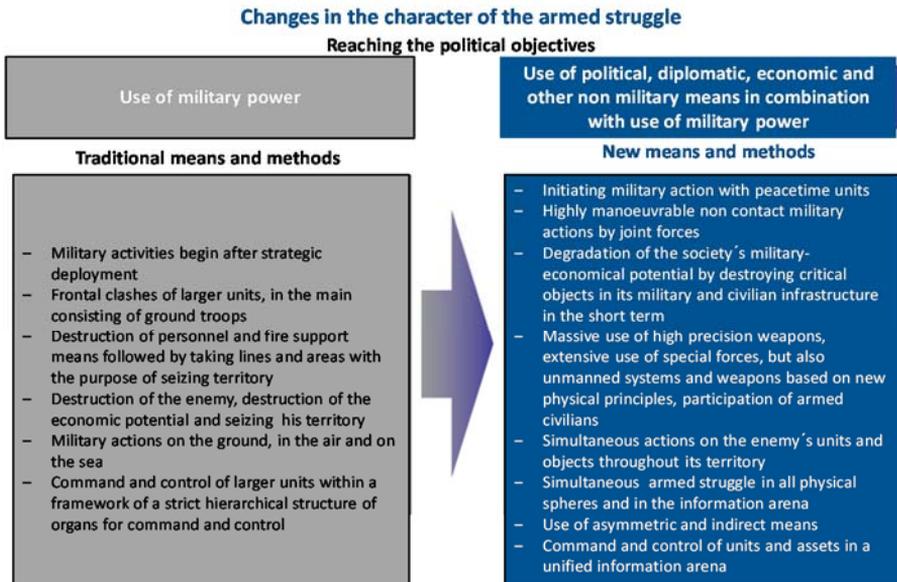
## Introduction

This chapter gives an account of Zapad 2013, based on information available from Russian, Belarusian and other open sources. What was the scope of Zapad 2013? Did it technically include only the activities carried out in Belarus and Kaliningrad Oblast, or did it comprise all the Russian and Belarusian training activities that were observed at the end of September 2013? Reports of the exercise, as described in publicly available accounts, give the impression that other seemingly separate large military exercises observed occurring in Russia around the same time as Zapad 2013, were, in fact, all linked in some fashion. Sometimes, these links were overtly described as falling “within the framework of Zapad 2013”; other ostensibly separate military exercise elements shared a time-related connection. This inherent difficulty in defining which elements were actually integral parts of the Zapad 2013 exercise, in turn, gives rise to discussions on how extensive Zapad 2013 truly was—approximately 13,000, 20,000 or 70,000 men?

The apparent ambiguity (at least to an outside observer) of the overall shape of the recent Zapad 2013 exercise reflects the Russian military establishment’s latest thinking on the realities of modern warfare. In other words, Russia (and to some extent Belarus) carried out an exercise that attempted to model armed operations in a modern conflict based on recent analysis of this subject by the Russian Academy of Military Sciences. For an illustration of the Russian military establishment’s understanding of the differences between traditional war and the more multi-faceted nature of modern military warfare, see Figure 1, below.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, February 26, 2013.



**Figure 1: Changes in the character of the armed struggle according to the “Gerasimov doctrine”**

Figure 1 outlines the ways in which the traditional means and methods of war are giving way to a more multi-faceted approach that includes political, economic, diplomatic and other means in conjunction with military force. Often called the “Gerasimov doctrine”—after Russian Chief of the General Staff (CGS) Valery Gerasimov, whose February 2013 article in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* lays out the above argument in more detail—this set of new methods and means of warfighting particularly highlights the need for sustainability, crisis management capability, and redundancy in civilian society. As such, perhaps the most important element of Zapad 2013 was that it included the participation of civilian authorities—the first time this has occurred in a Russian military exercise in the post-Soviet era.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has claimed that, “Mobilization plans today are not wholly compatible with the realities of a market economy.” Furthermore, for the most part, collaboration between the Russian Armed

Forces and civil society has been neglected in the past 20 years, and there has, therefore, been a need for fundamental change in the political and economic systems, legislative framework and other methods of such cooperation. Though seemingly not taken into consideration by the Russian military establishment until recently, this lack of coordination and its negative consequences for the country's mobilization system became apparent during an exercise in the Eastern Military District in July 2013. During that snap exercise, air transport flights to Sakhalin were delayed by ten hours: having landed in Chabarovsk, the aircraft could fly no further. This was initially attributed to the airport at Sakhalin not giving permission to land, but actually, it was due to the aircraft being unable to refuel in Chabarovsk.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, CGS Gerasimov wrote in a January 2014 report to the Russian Academy of Military Sciences: "In order to coordinate work in civil and military command organizations, planned joint training activities will be carried out." The first experience of such activities was in 2012, during a strategic staff exercise with civilian authorities. A year later, during the surprise checks, planned by the CGS and carried out during the strategic exercise Zapad 2013, "collaboration between federal executive bodies and the federal and local government leadership were worked through."<sup>3</sup> This approach was formalized in a regulation, issued in July 2013, and also explains why the General Staff has been tasked with coordinating the activities of all federal bodies to ensure the Russia's defense capability and security. Therefore, it is probable that during future larger exercises, civil and other authorities will also be exercised, as was the case during Zapad 2013.

The inclusion of civilian authorities in Zapad 2013, represents yet another step taken to increase Russia's military capabilities. In particular, special forces units from the Ministry of Interior (MVD) and the Federal Security Service (FSB) participated in the military elements of the exercise. Whether this is unique for Zapad 2013 is unknown, but until then, this was unprecedented.

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<sup>2</sup> Voennyj obozrevatel. (2013, July 14). Proverka boegotovnosti vojsk. Hronika sobytij za 13 ijulja 2013 goda. <http://warsonline.info/rossiyskaya-armiya/proverki-boegotovnosti-voysk-chronika-sobitij-za-13-ijulya-2013-goda.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Gerasimov, V. (2014, February 5). General'nyj shtab i oborona strany. Voyenno- Promyshlennyj Kuryer, 4 (522). Retrieved from <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/18998>.

The participation of MVD and FSB special forces units indicates that the Russian Armed Forces lack certain capabilities and that intervening against terrorists is not purely the business of the military and must be accomplished in collaboration with other power structures.

Zapad 2013 cannot be likened to the earlier exercise carried out in July 2013 in the Eastern Military District. That exercise was considerably more extensive, probably focused on another scenario with different aims—and when it started, it came as a surprise. Considering the preparation that took place before Zapad 2013, and the time those units took to reach their designated locations, the conditions should have been good for a completely successful exercise, which appears to have been the case. In particular, the final events of the exercise should have been an example of extensive preparation and preliminary training, given that Presidents Vladimir Putin and Alyaksandr Lukashenko visited the Zapad drills. Against this background, the actual value of Zapad 2013 can be discussed. Its usefulness as a test of military readiness would probably have been limited, but the training and practice involved in the exercise would probably have improved personnel skills and unit capability at lower levels. On the other hand, the benefit of the exercise to commanders and staffs is questionable—increased skills in staff procedures perhaps, but not much more. Therefore, Zapad 2013 can be seen as more of a symbolic exercise: in other words, it was likely meant to showcase military integration between Russia and Belarus. During Zapad 2013, Belarusian units carried out amphibious landings for the first time. Their level of capabilities after only one exercise is debatable, but if maintained and developed it would mean an increased amphibious landing capability in the Baltic Sea region.

As with many of Russia's previous exercises, failures in command and control were apparent. Despite the introduction of new command-and-control systems and communications equipment, functionality is thought to be low, and after the exercise in the Eastern Military District in July, it was reported that the communications effectiveness was only around 18 percent. Based on heretofore released reporting on Russia's command-and-control systems, it appears that the technology has deficiencies, which would indicate shortcomings in both domestic R&D and production. Post-exercise comments and accounts of experiences from Zapad 2013 have lacked specific information about damage to vehicles and the results of field firing training—

information that was reported after the July 2013 exercise in the Eastern Military District. This could indicate that, from a Russian perspective, the actual activities of units during Zapad 2013 were of lesser importance.

The Russian mobilization system was also practiced during Zapad 2013. But whether this was simply a matter of testing the system's functionality by calling up reservists in general, or if it was a test of the contract reservist scheme that is being considered (which, authorities have stated, will be introduced), is not clear from the evidence available. However, the fact that even personnel who had not completed basic training were called up strongly suggests that Zapad 2013 was probably designed to demonstrate a generalized calling up of reservists—and these people played the part of extras in testing the Russian mobilization system.

Finally, it should be noted that the exercise for the first time involved units from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Justification for this could be the fact that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is leaving Afghanistan, which some fear could allow for the spread of militants and terrorist groups into countries bordering Afghanistan. Against this background, a need may have been identified for an increased capability in the CSTO and its member states to meet such a threat.

### *Zapad 2013—Its Origins and Previous Exercises of a Similar Nature*

The Soviet Union carried out exercises with the name “Zapad” in 1973, 1977, 1981, 1984 and 1985. In particular, Zapad 1981 was one of the biggest exercises in the history of the Soviet Armed Forces and the Warsaw Pact and took place on September 4–12, 1981, in three of the then–Soviet Military Districts; approximately 100,000 men took part in the exercise.<sup>4</sup> Post-Soviet exercises in the Zapad series, on the other hand, have been bilateral exercises involving Russian and Belarusian troops and have been held every other year since 2009. The exercise series began in 2009 with Zapad 2009, which took place on September 18–29, 2009, on Russian and Belarusian territory; this was followed

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<sup>4</sup> Newsru.com. (2009, November 18). NATO utochnilo: rossijsko-belorusskie voennye uchenija "ne sootvetstvovali duhu" Venskih objazatel'stv. Retrieved from <http://www.newsru.com/world/18nov2009/up.html>.

in 2011 by Union Shield (September 16–22), which was only carried out on Russian territory. Finally, Zapad 2013 was held on September 20–26 of that year. Unlike previous exercises in the Zapad series, units from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—all members the CSTO—took part in the 2013 exercise. This list of participating countries overlapped with the participants in the exercise Cooperation 2013 that ran in parallel with Zapad 2013 and within the same framework scenario.

### *The Aims of the Exercise and Scenario*

The reported aims of the Zapad 2013 exercise were:

- Development of the operational interaction between staffs at different levels;
- Integration of the modern command-and-control and weapons systems;
- Establishment (evaluation) of the new regulations developed by the armed forces of Russia and Belarus; and
- Improvement of the practical skills of commanders and staff in the planning of military measures within the framework of a stabilization operation, and in the command of their units during such operations.

In addition to the above, the exercise also aimed to exercise the protection of more important societal functions/installations and to deal with the consequences of possible technical disasters. In terms of the latter, parallels can be drawn with what occurred within the framework of the July 2013 exercise in the Eastern Military District.<sup>5</sup>

Belarusian Defense Minister Jurij Zjadobin declared that the exercise scenario was based on conflicts in the Middle East. “When the aim of this exercise was decided upon, modern views about the use of military force were taken into

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<sup>5</sup> Smirnova, T. (2013, February 22). Kursom na «Zapad 2013». Krasnaja Zvezda. Retrieved from <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/7655-kursom-na-Zapad>, 2013.

account, based on the experiences of the armed conflicts in recent years in North Africa and the Middle East,” he said. During the exercise, measures were to be worked out “to counter illegal groups and mercenaries.” And according to Zjadobin, “In recent years all the conflicts that have arisen have had a similar scenario.” Thus, in the Zapad 2013 scenario, which was approved by the Belarusian president on February 18, 2013, the red or friendly side was made up of Russian, CSTO and Belarusian units supported on land and in the air from Russia; they faced the blue side, the opposing forces, who were trying to degrade social and political conditions in Belarus.<sup>6</sup>

The conduct of Russia and Belarus’s forces in the Zapad 2013 exercise has also been interpreted as practicing for a scenario in which NATO units are deployed and concentrated in Poland and the Baltic States, and then the North Atlantic Alliance initiates a large-scale offensive operation in an easterly direction. These views are supported by revealed details about the exercise: Namely, in the Zapad 2013 scenario, the military organizers invented four fictitious countries—Mordija, Lastija, Villija and Bugija—which were to be located on the borders of Belarus and western and northwestern regions of Russia. Lending further credence to the theory that Zapad 2013 was a rehearsal of a war with NATO forces in the Baltic region has been Russia’s expressed apprehension about the Alliance’s own exercises close to Belarus. Namely, Moscow has asserted that between 2010 and 2012, the North Atlantic Alliance’s military activity close to the Belarusian border has increased each year. In 2012 alone, NATO held 13 larger exercises in the Baltic States and in Poland that dealt with issues related to the provision and use of Alliance armed forces. And in autumn 2013, NATO carried out the staff exercise “Steadfast Jazz,” involving rapid reaction forces, in the Baltic area.

In this context, comments made by Alexander Lapin, the commander of the Russian 20<sup>th</sup> Army, regarding the Zapad 2013 exercise scenario is also of particular interest. In an interview with Ekho Moskvyy in December 2013, Lapin remarked:

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<sup>6</sup> RIA Novosti. (2013, August 28). Uchenie "Zapad 2013" projdet po scenariju blizhnevostochnyh konfliktov. Retrieved from [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20130828/959131055.html#ixzz2eyMSa3ur](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20130828/959131055.html#ixzz2eyMSa3ur); Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Belarus. (2013, August 13). «Zapad 2013» — uchenie oboronitel'nogo haraktera. Retrieved from <http://exercise.mil.by/detail.php?ID=18683>.

I must say that the exercise setting given to the 20<sup>th</sup> Army was a new one for us. We, the units in the 20<sup>th</sup> Army, took part in an armed conflict on the territory of an allied state [i.e. Belarus], where the [Russian] Army's units were involved in combined special operations in order to suppress illegal armed groups and impudent enemy special forces as well as to maintain [order in] a state of emergency. This was a new situation for us. We have basically prepared for exercises in conventional warfare. And you could say that the exercise situation was kept a secret from us as long as possible. But nevertheless we prepared for the task. The Army must be ready to repel any threat, be it internal or external. The Army was part of a regional force on an allied state's territory. We completed our mission to suppress larger illegal armed groups—a first for us, both for me as well as my unit commanders.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Guards Army was placed under the command of territorial defense formations in the Belarus Republic's Armed Forces and border troops. So as Army Commander, I not only completed my mission to suppress illegal armed groups and diversionary groups, but was also responsible for the protection of several sections of the border, including the airspace, and supporting the maintenance of a state of emergency. For us this was new.<sup>7</sup>

### *Numbers of Participating Personnel and Equipment*

Official information provided by Russian authorities reported that participating personnel, vehicles and so on totaled more than 13,000 men—10,400 from Belarus, 2,520 from Russia and 300–600 from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The information about participants from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan varies among different sources from a low of 300 to a high of “more than 600.” Information about Russian and Belarusian participation also varies, with some sources reporting Russian participation on Russian territory of 9,400 men and approximately

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<sup>7</sup> Echo Moskvyy. (2013, December 14). Interview with Alexander Lapin. Voennij sovet. Retrieved from <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/voensovet/1215805-echo/>.

2,500 in Belarus. The exercise also included 350 armored vehicles (of which, approximately 70 were tanks), 50 artillery pieces and rocket launchers, 10 vessels from the Baltic Sea Fleet, and 60 aircraft, including helicopters.

Reports in the Swedish media alleged that the exercise may actually have involved up to 70,000 men.<sup>8</sup> In reality, however, the overall number of participants in Zapad 2013 was certainly much larger than the official and reported figures named above. The problem is that the actual scope and number of participants is difficult to assess and depends on how Zapad 2013 is defined. Either the exercise can be seen only in terms of the activity that occurred on Russian and Belarusian territory, or in terms of the military and civilian activity that took place through the end of September within the framework of a common scenario, as indicated by the overall picture of both military and other exercise activity. So if one takes a broader view of what elements constituted a part of the Zapad 2013 exercise, then the total participants number approximately 22,000 men, of which 13,000 exercised on Belarusian territory and more than 9,500 on Russian territory. Additionally, the exercise involved 530 armored vehicles, 50 artillery pieces and rocket launchers, 10 vessels from the Baltic Sea Fleet, and 90 aircraft, including helicopters.<sup>9</sup>

### *Participating Units*

Those military units that could be specifically identified as having participated in Zapad 2013 are detailed in Table 1. It is estimated that the majority of the units shown below did not take part in the exercise as complete units, but rather with smaller elements/battalion(s).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> SvD Nyheter. (2014, March 25). Här siktar rysk soldat mot Jas Gripen. Retrieved from [http://www.svd.se/nyheter/utrikes/har-siktar-ryska-styrkor-mot-jas-gripen\\_8576542.svd](http://www.svd.se/nyheter/utrikes/har-siktar-ryska-styrkor-mot-jas-gripen_8576542.svd).

<sup>9</sup> BELTA. (2013a, October 2). Shhit vyderzhal udar. Retrieved from <http://www.sb.by/soyuz-belarus-rossiya/article/shhit-vyderzhal-udar.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Markushin, G. (2013, September 19). Materinskij nakaz synov'jam — raketčikam 465-j raketnoj brigady, uchastnikam uchenija «Zapad 2013». Belorusskaja voennaja gazeta, 176. Retrieved from <http://vsr.mil.by/2013/09/19/materinskij-nakaz-synovyam-raketčikam-465%E2%80%91j-raketnoj-brigady-uchastnikam-uchenija-Zapad-2013/>.

**Table 1: Russian Units in Zapad 2013**

<b>Units</b>	<b>Garrison</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b><u>6th Army</u></b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 138th Mechanized Battalion</li> </ul>	Kamenka	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25th Mechanized Battalion</li> </ul>	Vladimirskij camp	
<b><u>20th Army</u></b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headquarters</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2nd Mechanized Division</li> </ul>	Alabino	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9th Mechanized Battalion</li> </ul>	Niznij Novgorod	
<b><u>76th Guards Airborne Division</u></b>	Pskov	
<b><u>31st Airborne Battalion</u></b>	Uljanovsk	During the Cooperation 2013 exercise, completed an airborne landing, using approximately ten BMD-2 and 2S9 Nona vehicles.

From September 20, units of the 6th Army carried out drills whose scenario was consistent with that of Zapad 2013. Indeed, two sources from within the 138th Mechanized Battalion reported that their exercise activity was part of Zapad 2013.<sup>11</sup>

Those Russian units that participated in Zapad 2013 were reported to have returned to their garrison locations on October 1, by rail, which for elements

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<sup>11</sup> REGNUM (2014, April 30). Gvardejskaja Krasnoselskaja motostrelkovaja brigada marsjirueta v svoje 80-letie. Retrieved from <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1797394.html>.

of the 20th Army would have required 20 trains. By October 13, all participating Russian units should have returned to their garrison locations.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 2: Belarusian Units in Zapad 2013**

<b>Units</b>	<b>Garrison</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b><u>6th Mechanized Battalion</u></b>	Grodno	A mechanized armored brigade, air defense and artillery units participated in Zapad 2013
<b><u>11th Mechanized Battalion</u></b>	Slonim	
<b><u>120th Mechanized Battalion</u></b>	Urutje, Minsk	
<b><u>38th Mobile Brigade</u></b>	Vitebsk	Participated with a battalion of 200 men
<b><u>103rd Mobile Brigade</u></b>	Vitebsk	Participated with a battalion of 200 men
<b><u>465th Missile Brigade</u></b>	Tsel	
<b><u>336th Rocket Artillery Brigade</u></b>	Tsel	
<b><u>120th Air Defense Missile Brigade</u></b>	Baranovitji	
<b><u>85th Signals Brigade</u></b>	Baranovitji	
<b><u>48th Electronic Warfare Battalion</u></b>		
<b><u>7th Engineer Regiment</u></b>	Borisov	
<b><u>Local defense units</u></b>		The Stjytjinsk area, east of Grodno, toward the border with Lithuania

The battalion from the 103rd Mobile Brigade was relocated by rail to Lomonosov, where it arrived on September 12, and preparation took place for

<sup>12</sup> NEWSROOM24 (2013, October 1). Nizjegorodskie podrazdelenija 20-oj armii zapadnovo voennovo okruga vozvrastjajutsja c utjenija "Zapad-13". Retrieved from <http://newsroom24.ru/news/zhizn/67447/>.

loading the men and equipment onto landing craft (detailed below), which sailed from Lomonosov on September 15, and arrived in Kaliningrad oblast on September 17. After Zapad 2013, recovery was carried out via the same route and the landing craft that provided transport, the *Kaliningrad* and the *Georgij Pobedonosets*, returned from Lomonosov to their home bases on October 2.

In addition to the Russian and Belarusian participants in Zapad 2013, four other member states of the CSTO also contributed units. From Armenia, a platoon from the 3rd Spetsnaz Brigade joined the exercise. Also taking part was the Kazakhstani 37th Airborne Brigade as well operational groups comprising a number of officers from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Lastly, a number of territorial defense units were also involved, but it has not been possible to identify them.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Naval Forces*

One can assess, based on available reporting, that the ten Russian naval vessels participating in Zapad 2013 mainly came from the Baltic Sea Fleet. They included four project 1241 missile boats, the destroyer *Nastojtjivnij* and the corvettes *Stergysjtijj*, *Soobrazitelnij* and *Bojkij*.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the following landing craft have been identified, two of which do not belong to the Baltic Sea Fleet: The *Azov*, from the Black Sea Fleet, which left Sevastopol on August 12; the *Georgij Pobedonosets* (of the Northern Fleet); and the *Kaliningrad* (Baltic Sea Fleet). Besides these vessels, the Zapad 2013 exercise included the 336th Marine Infantry Brigade, the 7th Motorized Rifle Regiment (Kaliningrad), as well as naval helicopters. The Northern Fleet's exercise (September 21–25) included the 200th Mechanized Brigade (Petjenga) and the 61st Marine Infantry Regiment (Sputnik). Only partial elements of the aforementioned units participated.

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<sup>13</sup> BELTA. (2013b, September 23). Nachalsja vtoroj jetap sovместnogo belorussko-rossijskogo učenija "Zapad 2013". Retrieved from [http://www.belta.by/ru/all\\_news/society/Nachalsja-vtoroj-etap-sovmestnogo-belorussko-rossijskogo-uchenija-Zapad-2013-i-647050.html](http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/society/Nachalsja-vtoroj-etap-sovmestnogo-belorussko-rossijskogo-uchenija-Zapad-2013-i-647050.html).

<sup>14</sup> TASS. (2013a, September 18). Gvardejcev iz Belorussii - učasnikov učenija "Zapad 2013" - vstretili v Baltijske pod melodii voennogo orkestra Baltflota. Retrieved from <http://tass.ru/blizhnee-zarubezhe/678485>.

## *Air Forces*

It is unclear from the information available to which units the 60–90 aircraft and helicopters that took part in Zapad 2013 actually belonged. However, it is known that some of these (Su-24s) were deployed to the Matjulsjtji and Baranovitji air bases.

Advanced Russian Su-34 strike fighters also flew in the exercise. According to a Swedish national newspaper: “The first [of these] aircraft were delivered to the Russian Air Force in 2011, but as far as is known, they have never previously flown in the vicinity of Swedish airspace. So it was an unexpected sight when Swedish Gripen pilots were able to see and photograph five Suchoi-34s over the Baltic Sea.”<sup>15</sup>

The participation of Su-34s in the exercise was part of the testing of this newly introduced platform. The aircraft were located at the Baltimor Air Base, in the Voronezj, region, and the aim was to practice operating against targets at the limit of the strike fighter’ range.<sup>16</sup> The air units from the Western Military District returned to their home bases by September 30, having reportedly completed 100 sorties during Zapad 2013.

**Table 3: Belarusian Air Units During Zapad 2013**

Units	Garrison	Remarks
<b>50th Aviation Base</b>	Matjulisjtji	Mi-8 helicopters
<b>116th Guards Attack Aviation Base</b> <sup>17</sup>	Brest	
<b>181st Helicopter Aviation Base</b> <sup>18</sup>	Pruzjany	
<b>Air Defense units</b> <sup>19</sup>		

<sup>15</sup> Svenska Dagbladet. (2013, October 10). Ryskt attackplan över Östersjön. Retrieved from <http://www.svd.se/ryskt-attackplan-over-ostersjon>.

<sup>16</sup> Tichonov, A. (2013a, October 18). «Zapad 2013»: itogi i vyvody. Krasnaja zvezda. Retrieved from <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/daty/item/12205-Zapad-2013-itogi-i-vyvody>.

<sup>17</sup> Zhuk, I. (2013, September 27). «Zapad 2013»: final’nyj akkord. Belorusskaja voennaja gazeta, 182. Retrieved from <http://vsr.mil.by/2013/09/27/zapad%E2%80%91finalnyj-akkord/>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

### *Interior, Border, Security and Others Units*

Both Russian and Belarusian interior, border and security units took part in the exercise, including units belonging to the FSB. The Coastguard and special forces took part in the final event of the exercise, in Kaliningrad Oblast. Moreover, special forces from Russian interior troops also partook in the concluding Kaliningrad oblast drills. The special forces unit “Grom,” belonging to the Narcotics Police, participated in the exercises on the Kamenka firing range. Before and in parallel with Zapad 2013, Russian interior units carried out exercise activity assessed to have been linked to the exercise. Those interior units identified as having been involved in this exercise activity were the MVD Central Command; the MVD Regional Command Nizhne Novgorod; the MVD Division in Balasjiche, Moscow oblast; the 21st MVD Brigade from Sofrino, Moscow oblast; the 25th Special Unit in Merkurij, Smolensk; and the 604th Special Centre (unit) from Vitjaz, Moscow.

The extent to which Belarusian interior and border units participated in the exercise is unclear. It is known that units from the Belarusian Ministry of Emergency Situations participated in the exercise, but again the scope of their participation is unclear.

Finally, in addition to Russian units from the Western Military District, there is information about units from the Central Military District participating in Zapad 2013.<sup>20</sup>

### *Geographical Extent and Operational Command and Control*

The number of training areas said to have been used during Zapad 2013 varies between eight (six Belarusian and two Russian in Kaliningrad oblast) and ten. The exercise activity carried out by Russian interior troops and elements of the civilian administration, etc., however, would probably have had a greater geographic spread; for instance, the Zjernovka training area in Moscow oblast

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<sup>20</sup> BELTA. (2013c, September 26). Lukashenko i Putin nabljudajut za zavershajushhim jetapom uchenija "Zapad 2013" na Gozhskom poligone. Retrieved from [http://www.belta.by/ru/all\\_news/president/Lukashenko-i-Putin-nabljudajut-za-zavershajuschim-etapom-uchenija-Zapad-2013-na-Gozhskom-poligone\\_i\\_647369.html](http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/president/Lukashenko-i-Putin-nabljudajut-za-zavershajuschim-etapom-uchenija-Zapad-2013-na-Gozhskom-poligone_i_647369.html).

was reportedly amongst those used.<sup>21</sup> Overall control over Zapad 2013 was exercised by the Belarusian Minister of Defense and the Chief of the Russian General Staff. Operational control of the units taking part in Zapad 2013 was exercised by an operational headquarters located on the Obuz-Lesnovskij training area; a signals brigade from the 20th Army was also located there. Whether operational control was de facto exercised by the 20th Army HQ or by a temporary combined headquarters cannot be deduced from the information available. However, based on the interview with the Commander 20th Army mentioned previously, one can assess that the former was most likely the case. It is also unclear whether the HQ mentioned was part of the exercise control or only exercised operational control—or both.<sup>22</sup>

### *Preparation Before the Start of Zapad 2013*

Preparation before the exercise was extensive and seems to have begun as early as March 2013; it included combined Russian-Belarusian staff exercises in May and June. Participating units readied themselves in various ways for the exercise for a total of eight weeks. In total, preparation for Zapad 2013 reportedly involved 150 staff and unit exercises. Notably, this exercise activity, carried out by the Belarusian Armed Forces on July 25–31, included the participation of the 11th Mechanized Brigade and the 465th Missile Brigade, i.e. units that also participated in Zapad 2013.<sup>23</sup>

Belarusian training areas had been primed prior to the start of the exercise, and participating units moved by rail and other means from Russia as early as September 9. However, this movement of units was not without incident, as pictures of accidentally ditched tanks appeared in the Belarusian media. The period of time that was needed to transport these units may appear quite long,

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<sup>21</sup> Aleshkevich, D. (2013, September 18). Vojska zavershajut podgotovku k aktivnoj faze uchenija «Zapad 2013». Voенно – politicheskoe obozrenije. Retrieved from <http://www.belvpo.com/ru/29828.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Chairemdinov L. (2013, September 23). «Zapad 2013»: zavtra snova – v uchebnyj boj. Krasnaja zvezda. Retrieved from <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/component/k2/item/11665-za-pad-2013-zavtra-snova-v-uchebnyj-boj>.

<sup>23</sup> TASS. (2013b, September 23). Vtoraja faza strategicheskikh rossijsko-belorusskikh uchenij "Zapad 2013" projdet v Baltijskom more. Retrieved from <http://tass.ru/blizhnee-zarubezhe/696115>.

but the period of September 9–20 was, as far as can be seen, used for direct pre-exercise preparation, which is clear from reports about this activity from the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade.

### *Execution*

Zapad 2013 was carried out in two phases. Phase 1, from September 20 to 22, comprised planning for Phase 2; at the same time, units were deployed to and isolated those areas where—according to the exercise scenario—terrorists/illegal armed groups were active. Those units also provided air defense and protection for key civil and military installations. Phase 2 (September 23–26), or the active phase of the exercise, included the conduct of military operations to stabilize the situation.<sup>24</sup> Based on the reports shown on Russian and Belarusian TV, and on photographs taken during Zapad 2013, the exercise included both live-firing as well as the use of blank ammunition—in certain stages, before units arrived at a designated objective, the area would be bombarded by tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, artillery and/or from the air using live shells and explosives.

#### Phase 1: September 20–22

The exercise's first phase seems to have mostly involved simulating protecting the state border, supporting the maintenance of a state of emergency in the border area, protecting barracks and deployment locations, as well as carrying out anti-diversionary operations. This phase also included the establishment and defense of outposts, the gathering of signals intelligence (SIGINT), electronic warfare (EW) and intelligence gathering in order to locate opposing forces and then suppress them.

#### Phase 2: September 23–26

Phase 2 appears to have involved larger formations, which were also moved by air and sea, crossing the Belarusian border and penetrating Kaliningrad oblast.

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<sup>24</sup> Budkevich V. (2013, August 28). Zhadobin: Uchenija "Zapad 2013" nosjat sugubo oboronitel'nyj harakter. News.tut.by. Retrieved from <http://news.tut.by/society/363670.html>.

In the training scenario, these participating units took more active measures to suppress opposing forces. The culmination of the exercise took place on the Gozjki and Kaliningrad oblast firing ranges on September 26, in the presence of the Russian and Belarusian presidents. At one stage during this phase, on September 23, SIGINT was used to locate opposing forces; unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were then launched to continue intelligence gathering. With the aid of UAVs, the opposing force's location was identified and it was established that the force consisted of a few dozen men. This information was passed on to the superior HQ, which decided to destroy the enemy from the air using Mi-8 and Mi-24 attack helicopters. After the attack, a reconnaissance unit checked the results of the operation and reported that the enemy had been destroyed.<sup>25</sup> On September 24, vessels of the Baltic Sea Fleet that were maintaining a blockade of Kaliningrad oblast, fired guns and missiles at targets 10 km out to sea; in the training scenario, these targets represented vessels being used by the enemy to move personnel or supplies ashore. The scenario for the events in Kaliningrad included the movement of supplies by opposing forces using merchant shipping and fishing boats, and also by air using light aircraft.

During Phase 2, the Russian 9th Mechanized Brigade moved, probably on September 23, from the training area in the Brest area, where they had arrived on September 9, to the Gozjki training area. There, on September 25, with the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade, they attacked an enemy force of 2,000 men deployed in five different locations with air support from Su-25 ground attack jets. On September 26, the final events of the exercise took place on the Gozjki training area and in Kaliningrad oblast. The events at the Gozjki lasted approximately 40 minutes and began with a simulated air strike; then the "enemy" attacked an outpost and was subsequently engaged with fire from tanks, artillery and helicopters. This final event was watched by 26 observers and defense attachés from 20 countries.

For the final event in Kaliningrad oblast, two communities, Jeremolovka and Trofimovo, had been set up on the Chmelevka and Pravdinsk training areas with mock housing, schools, shops and targets representing vehicles. Moreover, five tons of various explosive charges and pyrotechnics were used

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<sup>25</sup> Chairemdinov, 2013.

for simulations, and 16 groups of range staff were on hand to deal with the impact simulation charges. According to the scenario being rehearsed, enemy forces had landed at Kaliningrad oblast and established their base in the communities mentioned, where the bulk of their force, approximately 700 men, was located—meanwhile, smaller elements tried to advance from Parusnoje, Divnovo and Primorsk towards Kaliningrad and Baltijsk. The red (friendly) force was initially tasked with delaying any advance toward Kaliningrad and Baltijsk and to force the enemy out of Parusnoje, Divnovo and Primorsk. Then, the area would be secured along the coast in order to prevent the enemy from escaping that way. When both these measures had been completed, the enemy would finally be destroyed. The main combat activity of this event is assessed to have been on the Chmelevka training area.<sup>26</sup>

During this event, the authorities intended to carry out a parachute drop, including a company and six BMD-2 infantry fighting vehicles from the 76th Guards Airborne Battalion, but this was canceled because of wind conditions—winds reached speeds of 20 meters per second, and higher in the villages along the beach. However, there was a flyover by Il-76s loaded with BMD-2s because they had taken off before the order to cancel was given. The event also included an amphibious landing by a Russian marine infantry battalion and a battalion from the Belarusian 103rd Mobile Brigade. In addition, Coast Guard units as well as special forces units from the interior ministry and the FSB took part.

#### *Activities/Exercises Run in Parallel With or Related to Zapad 2013*

The Russian Armed Forces carried out an extensive list of other exercise activity that took place at the same time as or had direct links to Zapad 2013. According to a September 23, 2013, article in Moskovskiy Komsomolets: “Concurrently, approximately 10,000 Russian military personnel are involved in parallel exercise activity that has no connection with the central idea of the

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<sup>26</sup> Tichonov, A. (2013b, September 27). «Zapad 2013»: pervye vyvody. Krasnaja zvezda. Retrieved from <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/daty/item/11764-Zapad-2013-pervye-vyvody>.

exercise [Zapad 2013].”<sup>27</sup> Moskovskiy Komsomolets also declared that simultaneous drills were being carried out by missile units in Luga and the Northern Fleet. Nonetheless, other reporting explicitly tied elements of the exercise activity concurrent with or linked to Zapad 2013 as being directly part of or related to the exercise. As a result, the overall military training activity up to the end of September presents a picture of some sort of cohesion between the various exercises and the September 20–26 drills in Belarus and Kaliningrad oblast, carried out under the name Zapad 2013.<sup>28</sup>

As illustrated by Figure 2, the exercise activity carried out in connection with Zapad 2013, which in the majority of cases had a scenario similar to that of Zapad 2013, and which is assessed to have had links to the exercise consisted of:

- Exercises by civil authorities,
- Exercise activity within the interior ministry and its units,
- Cooperation 2013,
- Exercise activity within the Northern Fleet,
- The September 23 air defense exercise,
- Exercise activity on the Kamenka training area,
- Exercise activity on the Strugij Krasnye firing range,
- Exercise activity on the Luga training area,
- Exercise activity within the Strategic Missile Forces,

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<sup>27</sup> Kalinin, I. (2013, September 22). Lukashenko primerjaet sud'bu Asada. Mk.ru. Retrieved from <http://www.mk.ru/politics/army/article/2013/09/22/919134-lukashenko-primeryaet-sudbu-asada.html>.

<sup>28</sup> MKRU. (2013, September 22). Lukasjenko primerjajet sudbu Asada. Retrieved from <http://www.mk.ru/politics/army/article/2013/09/22/919134-lukashenko-primeryaet-sudbu-asada.html>.

- Exercise activity within airborne units, and
- Anti-terrorist exercises in the Minsk metro and in St Petersburg.



**Figure 2: Exercise Activity Concurrent With Zapad 2013**

### *Exercises by Civilian Authorities*

On September 16, Russian President Putin, who was in Sochi, held a video conference with the leadership of the Ministry of Defense. Also taking part in the video conference were those civilian authorities tasked to later take part in the Zapad 2013 exercise. Speaking to his subordinates, Putin declared: “concurrently with the Armed Forces’ preparation for the Zapad 2013 exercise, interior ministry units and a number of civilian institutions—the transport ministry, the energy ministry and the leadership of Novgorod oblast—are to carry out extensive inspections.” Moreover, he ordered an operational group to be organized within the defense ministry, under the control of General of the Army Arkadij Bachin, which would collaborate with the aforementioned civilian authorities.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the civilian institutions explicitly listed above, the Zapad 2013 exercise also involved authorities from the Gatjina municipality, where

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<sup>29</sup> President of Russia. (2013, September 16). Selektornoe soveshhanie s rukovodstvom Ministerstva oborony. Retrieved from <http://president.kremlin.ru/news/19226>.

reservists were called up, as well the government of Smolensk oblast. The Novgorod local government's involvement was probably linked to the fact that the 20th Army units that took part in Zapad 2013 are based in that oblast. Starting from September 17, the leadership of Novgorod's oblast was tasked with relocating to a reserve HQ outside Nizhnij Novgorod, mobilization issues and territorial defense. As Novgorod oblast's Governor Sergei Mitin put it: "We are helping to mobilize personnel and vehicles; we are preparing vehicle convoys for the military maintenance services in order to make them available to the Armed Forces to organize a battalion to be included in territorial defense."<sup>30</sup>

### *Exercise Activity Within the Interior Ministry and Its Units*

On September 17, Russia carried out an exercise began for armed units of the interior ministry, involving 20,000 men as well as a call-up of reservists. Reportedly, this exercised continued until at least the end of the 38th week of the year (September 16–22). According to the exercise scenario, interior ministry units were to avert diversionary attacks, free hostages, fight terrorists and protect key installations.<sup>31</sup> Information available indicates that this exercise was linked to Zapad 2013 and territorial defense, including the protection of Rosatom, transport ministry and energy ministry installations, as well as the redeployment of interior ministry units from the Moscow area to other regions of Russia. A number of subsidiary exercises were carried out within the framework of this exercise, including one on September 20, at the MVD Central Regional Command's training area in Zjernovka. The exercise involved intervention and engagement of hostile special forces and terrorists. As well as interior ministry units, the MVD's special forces unit—Mercurij—took part in the exercise.

Concurrently with Zapad 2013, the exercise Cooperation 2013 took place on September 19–25, in Mogilev oblast, Belarus, with the participation of units from several CSTO member countries. Based on the information available, it

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<sup>30</sup> Vesti.ru. (2013, September 23). V Smolenskom rajone proshli uchenija po territorial'noj oborone. Retrieved from <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1133279>.

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of interior of the Russian Federation. (2013, September 17). Vnutrennie vojska MVD Rossii prodolzhat provedenie special'nyh uchenij "Zapad 2013". Retrieved from <https://mvd.ru/news/item/1220980>.

is not absolutely clear how this exercise was integrated with Zapad 2013, although one can assess the two scenarios were related. Nevertheless, it is understood that the units participating in Cooperation 2013 are included in the numbers participating overall in Zapad 2013.<sup>32</sup>

The final event of Cooperation 2013 took place on September 25, at the Osipovitji training area, where, according to the exercise scenario, a force of 250 “bandits”—whose objective was to reach a gas compressor station and destroy it—was defeated. Included in this event was an airborne landing of a force of three companies made up of units from Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The air drop included an artillery battery equipped with the 2S9 Nona self-propelled 120-milimeter mortar; this is reported to be the first time the 2S9 has ever been air dropped.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Exercise Activity Within the Northern Fleet*

The Northern Fleet carried out an exercise on September 21–25 involving up to 30 vessels, 20 aircraft and helicopters, and approximately 2,500 men. The exercise, reported to have been one of the more important by the Northern Fleet in 2013, took place in the Barents Sea and Kara Sea and included anti-submarine operations, air defense, coastal defense, countering amphibious landings and search-and-rescue (SAR) operations. The coastal defense/counter amphibious operations phase also involved airborne troops; on September 24, 300 men from the 98th Airborne Guards Division were landed by helicopter at the Pumanki training area on the Srednij peninsula in order to reinforce units defending the coast. Interestingly, the exercises in coastal defense and countering amphibious landings “dealt with issues related to taking areas of terrain in a situation where the enemy had used weapons of mass destruction [WMD].” However, there was no mention of the type of WMD in question. And the information available gives no accounts from any

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<sup>32</sup> The Collective Security Treaty Organization. (2013, September 17). «Vzaimodejstvie-2013» otrabotajut na zapade. Retrieved from [http://www.odkb-csto.org/news/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=2691](http://www.odkb-csto.org/news/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=2691).

<sup>33</sup> Kononovich, E. (2013, October 3). Sovmestnye belorussko-rossijskie uchenija «Zapad 2013». Narodnaja gazeta. Retrieved from <http://ng.sb.by/soyuznoe-veche/article/sovmetnye-belorussko-rossijskie-ucheniya-Zapad-2013.html>.

other exercises—during or linked to Zapad 2013—of any similar exercise events.

#### *Air Defense Exercise: September 23*

On September 23, the day that Phase 2 of Zapad 2013 began, an air defense exercise took place in the Central Military District involving five aviation bases and a number of air defense units. The scenario for the exercise was a surprise air attack, and the exercise also led to restrictions of civilian air traffic to/from airports in the Moscow area.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Exercise Activity at the Kamenka Training Area*

On September 20–26, an exercise activity took place at the Kamenka firing ranges; units assessed to come from the 138th Mechanized Brigade took part and included 700 men, approximately 200 vehicles and artillery pieces, and 10 helicopters. The special forces unit Grom, from the Narcotics Police, also took part; and during the exercise, Grom stormed a narcotics factory.

#### *Exercise Activity at the Strugij Krasnye Training Area*

Concurrently with the exercise activity at Kamenka, a corresponding/similar exercise activity took place at the Strugij Krasnye firing range, with units assessed to come from the 25th Mechanized Brigade, and air assault units from the 76th Guards Airborne Division. More than 500 men, 60 vehicles and artillery pieces, and 8 helicopters took part in the exercise.<sup>35</sup>

Exercise activity at the Luga training area. For two weeks in September, rocket artillery and missile units from the Western Military District carried out exercises at the Luga firing range. During these exercises, firings of Iskander,

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<sup>34</sup> Radio Business FM. (2013, September 23). Voennye uchenija perekryli nebo stolicy dlja grazhdanskoj aviacii. Retrieved from <http://www.bfm.ru/news/230231>.

<sup>35</sup> Vesti-Pskov. (2013, September 23). Strategicheskie voennye uchenija proshli na poligone pod Strugami Krasnymi. Retrieved from <http://www.gtrkpskov.ru/news-feed/news/4697-strategic-soldiery-manoevres-passed-on-a-ground-under-red.html>.

Tochka-U, Smertj and Uragan weapons systems were conducted, and included targets described as “hostile subversives.”<sup>36</sup>

#### *Exercise Activity Within the Strategic Missile Forces*

On September 23–28, a staff exercise took place at the 54th Missile Division, in Tejkovo, equipped with Topol-M and Jars, under the direction of the commander of the Strategic Missile Forces. More than 1,500 men participated in the exercise, which, among other issues, dealt with increasing states of readiness.

#### *Exercise Activity Within the Airborne Units*

The authorities held an exercise on September 24–27, in Tula and Rjazan oblast, involving a battalion from the 106th Guards Airborne Division. The exercise included the following activities: an air drop, marches to ranges and live firing. On the basis of the information available, no clear tie in between this exercise and Zapad 2013 is apparent, but a linkage cannot be ruled out.

#### *Antiterrorist Exercise in the Minsk Metro Area and in St. Petersburg*

On September 23, an antiterrorist exercise took place in the Minsk metro, which involved the investigation of suspected terrorists and searching for explosives. As a result of the exercise, the metro station Plosjtjad Jakuba Kolasa was closed for just over an hour. The exercise caused a certain amount of fear and confusion among the general public, which became apparent on various social media platforms. However, the Belarusian Ministry of Defense denied that the exercise had any connection with Zapad 2013.<sup>37</sup> Two days later, on September 25, an exercise, assessed to have been an antiterrorist exercise, was held in St Petersburg, where, according to the scenario, security personnel at Vantovy Bridge discovered a suspicious individual who was taken into custody

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<sup>36</sup> Baltinfo. (2013a, September 22). Pod Lugož raketčiki ZVO unichtožhili vse učebynye celi kompleksami «Iskander», «Tochka», «Smerch» i «Uragan». Retrieved from <http://www.baltinfo.ru/2013/09/22/Pod-Lugoi-raketčiki-ZVO-unichtožhili-vse-učebynye-celi-kompleksami-Iskander-Tochka-Smerch-i-Uragan-380899>.

<sup>37</sup> Tut.by. (2013, September 23). GUVĐ Mingorispolkoma: V metro prohodili učenija. Retrieved from <http://news.tut.by/society/367388.html>.

when it was found that this person had attached an explosive charge to the bridge (TV-100, 2013).

### *Other Exercise Activity*

It is worth noting that a bilateral Russian-Polish antiterrorist exercise also took place at the same time as Zapad 2013. The scenario practiced by the two countries' military forces involved a simulated intervention in the case of a hijacked aircraft. Russian participation included Su-27s based in Kaliningrad oblast (Baltinfo, 2013; Administration of the Uljanovsk municipality, 2013).

### *Call-Up of Reservists*

Both Russian and Belarusian reservists were called up for Zapad 2013 and other related exercises. Russian reservists were called up for the Armed Forces as well as interior ministry units. The total number is unknown, but in Leningrad's oblast, at least 2,000 reservists (the Russian defense ministry says 1,500) were called up for a period of two weeks. Among the Russian units that exercised on Belarusian territory, 700 of these were identified as reservists who had been called up.<sup>38</sup>

The media reported that this was the first time in 25 years there had been any call-up of reservists for exercises. These Russian reservists were, at the most, 45 years of age. Nominal rolls revealed that 100 of them, who were over 27 years old, had not gone through basic military training. The aim of the call-up was to test the Russian mobilization system. The greatest number of reservists came from Boksitogorska, Vsevolozjska, Viborg and St. Petersburg and those called up were assigned to units, including the 138th Mechanized Brigade as well as artillery units that exercised in the Luga area.

The call-up was a surprise; there was no prior warning. As one of those called up said, "I simply got a phone call one evening and was told: 'Get yourself ready, combat readiness number one.'" The individual concerned thought it

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<sup>38</sup> Administration of the Uljanovsk municipality. (2013, September 24). Partizanskaja mobilizacija. Retrieved from [http://www.admsablino.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3773:2013-09-24-14-39-00&catid=12:47&Itemid=62](http://www.admsablino.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3773:2013-09-24-14-39-00&catid=12:47&Itemid=62).

was all a joke and called the chairman of the local authority in order to obtain confirmation of the call-up. Apparently, no exemptions from the call-up were granted, apart from illness.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, Russian reservists were apparently in a better situation than their Belarusian counterparts. After Zapad 2013, stories have leaked in the Belarusian news and social media about a shortage of personnel equipment (for example some uniforms still had Soviet insignia on them), a lack of accommodations and poor food. Moreover, it seems that the call-up of reservists in Belarus perhaps did not function fully or as intended; people in their 50s were called up, which should never have happened.<sup>40</sup>

### *Confidence-Building Measures*

Prior to and during Zapad 2013, a range of confidence-building measures were taken. On July 24, 2013, Russia informed the NATO-Russia Council of the scope and content of the upcoming fall exercise, the number of participants, and so on. Moscow provided the same information to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), on August 8. Additionally, both the Russian and Belarusian defense ministries posted comprehensive details of the exercise on their respective websites.<sup>41</sup> In connection with the exercise, Moscow invited international observers—in the form of attachés accredited in Russia—to the exercise; some 60 of these invitations were taken up.

### *Miscellanea in Connection With Zapad 2013*

Psychologists were also involved in Zapad 2013. A total of five military sites hosted civilian psychologists who belonged to the units participating in the exercise. The main task of the psychologists was to constantly monitor the

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<sup>39</sup> Lenoblastnews.info. (2013, September 27). Vmesto raboty - «na vojnu». Retrieved from <http://lenoblastnews.info/society/item/5536-uchenia.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Nasha niva. (2013, October 3). Uchenija «Zapad 2013» glazami prizvannogo na sbory: rvanoe bel'e, dyrjavye palatki, otsutstvie pit'evoj vody. Retrieved from <http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=115976&lang=ru>.

<sup>41</sup> Radio Golos Rossii. (2013, September 23). Posol'stvo Rossii v Latvii protiv nevernoj traktovki uchenij «Zapad 2013». Retrieved from <http://news.rambler.ru/21229002/>.

exercise participants' morale and psychological condition, but also to train them in giving psychological first aid.<sup>42</sup>

The Russian Ministry of Defense spent 2.56 million rubles (approximately \$76,800 in September 2013) on gifts, including medals and Komandirskij brand watches. After the exercise, these gifts were presented to personnel who were deemed to have earned them—including 300 personnel in the Baltic Sea Fleet.

During the period September 20–26, there was a ban on selling alcohol in certain places in Pskov oblast and also areas in the vicinity of some firing ranges, including Strugokrasnenskij municipality, where one of the airborne units' firing ranges is located.

During Zapad 2013, a temporary Russian Orthodox chapel was set up on the Chmelevka training area. It was named after Alexander Nevskiy and was decorated with one icon and the three patron saints of the Russian Navy, which had been specially moved there from Moscow.<sup>43</sup>

Repair and maintenance units participating in Zapad 2013 were based in camps close to the exercise areas. These camps were considered to have been of a good standard. Unlike previous times, heating was provided using briquettes rather than wood out of environmental concerns. Sixty people were responsible for the supply of rations, and during the exercise, the total volume reached 100 tons. The medical services seemed to have more than 100 doctors and healthcare staff and some 25 ambulances, both wheeled and tracked.<sup>44</sup> It has not been possible to find any information about damage to vehicles

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<sup>42</sup> Public relations service of the Western military district. (2013, September 21). Psihologi ZVO prinimajut aktivnoe uchastie v sovместnom strategicheskom učenii «Zapad 2013». Retrieved from

<http://structure.mil.ru/structure/okruga/west/news/more.htm?id=11843828@egNews>.

<sup>43</sup> Rossiiskaja gazeta. (2013, September 25). Dlja uchastnikov učenij "Zapad 2013" na beregu Baltiki postroili hram. Retrieved from <http://www.rg.ru/2013/09/25/reg-szfo/church-anons.html>.

<sup>44</sup> RIA Novosti. (2013b, September 25). "Svetlica" i "Akacija-M" sledjat za nuzhdami voennyh na "Zapad 2013". Retrieved from

[http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20130925/965686426.html#ixzz2fzMQOtk](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20130925/965686426.html#ixzz2fzMQOtk).

incurred during Zapad 2013, along the lines of that reported after the July exercise in the Eastern Military District.

### *Experiences and Results of the Exercise*

Like many times before, the results of Zapad 2013 were publicly deemed to have been essentially positive. Soon after the final exercise event in Kaliningrad oblast, the Russian president announced that the exercise formed yet another step in securing the operational compatibility of the two countries'—Russia's and Belarus'—armed forces. And as Russian Defense Minister Shoigu said after a joint Russian-Belarusian meeting following Zapad 2013: “The exercise’s main training task [training objective]—to destroy illegal armed groups and stabilize the situation—has been successfully achieved” (Tichonov, 2013a).

At an ensuing meeting at the Russian defense ministry, on October 18, which addressed the experiences stemming from Zapad 2013, the Russian Chief of the General Staff Gerasimov said: “It is essential that we are more persistent, logical and concrete in improving the Armed Forces’ ability to engage in local wars and armed conflicts, taking into account the nature of the threats to the Russian Federation,” adding, “but without weakening our ability to hit back against large-scale aggression.” According to Gerasimov, “Analysis of the results of the exercise Zapad 2013 underlined the correctness of the directions chosen for the Armed Forces’ development and capability build-up.” On the whole, according to the chief of the General Staff’s assessment, the stated objectives of the exercise had been achieved. However, further development would be required in the collaboration between military and civilian authorities.

Analysis of the experiences from the exercise made it clear once again that there are shortcomings in the Russian Armed Forces’ command and control as well as communications. On October 18, Gerasimov said: “The condition of the stock of command vehicles and means of communication at command posts in the field do not fully meet contemporary requirements for mobility, protection and the capability to ensure the operational command of units.” As

he concluded, “This shows that the problems that became apparent during the war with Georgia, in August 2008, have not yet been rectified.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Gazeta.ru. (2013, October 10). Svjaz c brakom. Retrieved from [http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2013/10/18\\_a\\_5715005.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2013/10/18_a_5715005.shtml).

# Zapad 2013: A View From Helsinki

*Pauli Järvenpää*

## Introduction

In September 2013, the Russian-led military exercise Zapad 2013 (“West 2013”) took place in the Russian Western Military District and in Belarus. This was a combined joint forces exercise, which geographically covered the western parts of Russia, western Belarus, the enclave of Kaliningrad, which borders Lithuania and Poland, and the Baltic Sea. Some of the operations extended all the way up to the Barents Sea and its air space off the Kola Peninsula.

The participants in this exercise were the armed forces of Russia and Belarus, and the active part of the exercise lasted from September 20 to 26. Exercise preparations had been launched already on September 1, with the concentration of troops in embarkation areas and in combat training sites. The transportation of the exercise troops was carried out by 25 troop trains and dozens of transport aircraft flights over a distance of up to 1,500 kilometers.<sup>1</sup> Zapad 2013 is particularly relevant in today’s security context. At this writing, the precarious situation in and around Ukraine continues. The very same troops that took part in the Zapad 2013 exercise just a few months before—according to the Russian sources, roughly 150,000 of them—were put on a high alert in a “snap combat exercise” while the Ukrainian crisis was developing. Thus, as Zapad 2013 demonstrated, Russian capabilities as well as the Russian moves in Crimea and around Ukraine highlight that Russia also has political will to use these capabilities. This was brought unmistakably

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<sup>1</sup> Historically, the Russians have compensated for the relative shortcomings in their strategic and operational air transport mobility by relying on their railway logistics system. Special railway troops are under the command of the Ministry of Defense Railway Troops. The arrangement has, like other parts of the Russian defense system, been under reform, and they are now directly subordinated to the four military districts since December 1, 2010. For a thorough study of Russia’s strategic mobility, see Roger N. McDermott, *Russia’s Strategic Mobility. Supporting ‘Hard Power’ to 2020?*, FOI-R—3587—SE, April 2013.

home in March 2014 by the highly publicized and televised appearance of President Vladimir Putin observing a massive live-fire demonstration at the Kirilovski training site on the Karelian Isthmus west of St. Petersburg—all while Russian troops were infiltrating Crimea.

### **A Glimpse Into Russian Military Capabilities**

As with all military exercises, Zapad 2013 serves as a window to observe what the highest political and military leadership in the exercise-organizing country regards as military threats and challenges. At the same time, it gives a rare glimpse into that country's military capabilities, especially into the functioning of its command-and-control systems. And finally, such major exercises as Zapad 2013 give outsiders a better understanding of what the mindset of that country's military is. In particular, they open up an avenue to analyzing how the military is using its forces and to what purposes.

So, what do the Russian capabilities facing Finland look like today? What military capabilities for conventional warfare does Russia possess in the Leningrad Military District (part of the new Western Military District) next to the Finnish border, and how are they exercised, including Zapad 2013?<sup>2</sup>

First, the new command structure adopted by Russia on December 1, 2010, has major consequences for Finland, as well as for the Baltic States—Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Four new commands replaced the six former military districts. All forces, including those of the other power ministries, were to be subordinated to these commands. A new Western Military District, with its headquarters established in St. Petersburg, was formed by combining the forces of the former Leningrad and Moscow military districts, the Northern and Baltic Fleets (but not the strategic missile submarines home-ported at

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<sup>2</sup> In this short paper, the answers given to these questions can only be on a highly general level. For an excellent basic detailed study, see the publication coauthored by a well-known Finnish national security scholar and three former high-level Finnish military intelligence officers, Stefan Forss, Lauri Kiianlinna, Pertti Inkinen and Heikki Hult, *The Development of Russian Military Policy and Finland*, National Defense University, Department of Strategic and Defense Studies, Series 2: Research Reports no. 49, Helsinki, 2013. This author is also indebted to a number of military intelligence officials from various countries for the interviews quoted in this study. For obvious reasons, the officials prefer not to be quoted for attribution by name.

their Kola Peninsula bases), the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Force and Air Defense Command, as well as the forces based in Kaliningrad.

Second, as a result of Russia's reform of its armed forces, the previous heavy divisions have given way to lighter and more flexible brigades. In the Western Military District, when the reorganization will be carried through, there will be more than 60 brigades or equivalents in permanent readiness or to be established from reserves in mobilization.<sup>3</sup> The long-term goal is that all the ground forces formations will eventually become fully-manned, permanent-readiness units. Readiness is defined as these forces' ability to be deployable on short notice, in 6–8 hours. General conscription will not be abandoned, but the high-readiness forces will mainly consist of professional soldiers. That, for its part, will make it possible for Russia to carry out fast, coordinated military operations—a huge improvement over the state of affairs in the Russian military as recently as 10–15 years ago.

Ground forces east and southeast of Finland come under the command of the Russian 6<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters located at Agalotovo on the Karelian Isthmus not far from St. Petersburg. As to the ground forces units, there are three high-readiness brigades on the isthmus, as well as a helicopter unit supporting the brigades. Further south, an airborne assault division is deployed at Pskov, including a Special Forces (*spetsnaz*) brigade. In the north, there will be a combat helicopter regiment redeployed at Alakurtti. In that same area, which lies half way up toward Murmansk from St. Petersburg, there is an equipment depot that, during mobilization, will support a motorized infantry brigade. There is also another depot in Petrozavodsk that has equipment for yet another infantry brigade. All in all, there are then potentially six ground forces brigades in readiness or to be produced in mobilization in the Leningrad Military District.<sup>4</sup>

Third, over the last few years, Russian economic interests in the Arctic and the Baltic Sea basin have noticeably increased. This goes hand-in-hand with the Russian energy production and energy transmission route interests in the

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<sup>3</sup> See *The Military Balance 2013*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, London, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Forss et. al, op. cit., Annex 3, “The Development of Russian Military Potential Nearby Finland,” pp. 83–91.

north of Russia. As a consequence, Russian military interest has also steadily grown in those parts. The Russian authorities have declared that two Arctic brigades are being planned. It is not entirely clear at this moment what the timetable for the deployment will be. It was originally foreseen that the 200<sup>th</sup> Motorized Infantry Brigade in Pechenga (the former Finnish town of Petsamo), some 10 kilometers from the Russian-Norwegian border, would be reorganized as an Arctic brigade already by the end of 2011. The other Arctic brigade was planned to be established in the Arkhangelsk area. However, its deployment has been delayed, and now the target date for the first brigade seems to have slipped to 2015. It will remain to be seen if the plans will be implemented and properly resourced, but the current best guess is that the Arctic brigades will be operational by 2015–2017.<sup>5</sup>

All in all, the Russian ground forces units in the vicinity of Finland are in the process of rapid refurbishment. They are in the forefront of modernization, and they will be supported by traditionally strong Russian artillery units with heavy rocket launchers and more regular artillery units. Air force units based in the area have a total strength of more than two hundred combat aircraft and more than a hundred combat helicopters, supported by an equal number of armed transport helicopters and transport planes.<sup>6</sup> When one adds to this impressive list of modern or modernized equipment, the new missile system Iskander-M, deployed in a missile brigade based in Luga, south of St. Petersburg, with its maximum range being potentially as long as 700 kilometers, one gets the message that in the Western Military District the Russian military is back, and with a vengeance.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, most of the Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons storage sites are located in the Western Military District. Half of the active depots are in that Military District, supporting more than 20 dual-capable units. Twelve of these

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<sup>5</sup> Interview by the author. See also “Russian commandos train for Arctic combat defense,” October 14, 2013, <[http://www.en.ria.ru/military\\_news/20131014/184143129](http://www.en.ria.ru/military_news/20131014/184143129)>.

<sup>6</sup> Forss et.al., op.cit., pp. 88–89.

<sup>7</sup> See Stefan Forss, *The Russian operational-tactical Iskander missile system*, National Defense University, Department of Strategic and Defense Studies, Series 4, Working Paper No 42, Helsinki, 2012.

units are located on the Kola Peninsula, in the vicinity of St. Petersburg, and in Kaliningrad.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Official Russian View**

According to Russia's official notification to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Zapad 2013 was to be an exercise bringing together 12,900 troops in Belarus, of which 2,500 troops were Russian. They were to be supported by 350 pieces of combat equipment, including 70 main battle tanks, 280 armored vehicles and 52 aircraft and helicopters. In Kaliningrad, the exercise included 9,400 troops (200 of them from Belarus) with another set of 350 pieces of combat equipment, including 10 main battle tanks, 170 armored vehicles, 40 aircraft and helicopters, and 10 naval vessels of the Baltic Fleet.<sup>9</sup> In addition to having notified the OSCE, the Russian authorities briefed the NATO-Russia Council on Zapad 2013 in August 2013.

The official scenario the Russian authorities offered for Zapad 2013 was that in the exercise the Russian and Belarusian forces would oust a terrorist element that had seized Belarusian territory. Within that major scenario, the task of the troops was to conduct a special operation for the elimination of illegal armed formations (terrorists) and to stabilize the situation. That included the redeployment of military units of the Regional Grouping of Troops/Forces and the Baltic Fleet to the areas of operation of the illegal armed formations, isolating the areas of terrorist operations.

At the same time, actions by the Air Force and Air Defense Grouping were aimed at supporting the land forces groupings and blocking the illegal armed formations' supply channels by air. Furthermore, the exercise tasking was to ensure the sea blockade by the Baltic Fleet forces, and to interdict the illegal armed formations' withdrawal by sea. Finally, the task of the Russian component of the Regional Grouping of Troops/Forces was to protect the state border in the territory of the Republic of Belarus.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview by the author.

<sup>9</sup> The information the Russian authorities provided in their OSCE notification is summed up by Colonel General Alexander N. Postnikov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, to the 732<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Forum for Security Cooperation, October 30, 2013.

According to Russian sources, the primary objectives of Zapad 2013 were: 1) to improve the interoperability of staffs at different levels; 2) to test the compatibility of advanced command and control systems; 3) to test the provisions of new service regulations developed in the armed forces of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation; and 4) to practice the abilities of commanders and staffs in planning of military operations, as well as the command and control of troops during such operations.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the official notification to the OSCE stated that the exercise would consist of two parts. The first part was to last three days, September 20–23, and it would include planning by the multiservice grouping of troops in circumstances of a growing threat. That part saw the planning of special operations of the Baltic Fleet and a regional grouping of troops. Also, the troops' command and control during the operational deployment was to be established.

The second part was to last four days, from September 23 to 26, and its main theme was the troops' command and control in operations to stabilize the situation. According to the Russian authorities, that part consisted of four phases: troop control while protecting the borders of Belarus; troops' command and control during special operations aimed at eliminating illegal armed formations and terrorist groups; command and control of multiservice groupings for the prevention of the reinforcement of illegal armed formations and the suppression of their material supply; and, finally, command and control of the grouping of troops of the Baltic Fleet in blocking and eliminating illegal armed formations and terrorist groups during a special operation.<sup>11</sup>

In their official justifications of the Zapad 2013 scenario, the Russian authorities continued to envision the exercise scenario as an attack by illegal armed formations and terrorist groups on the sovereign state of Belarus, and the following combined joint Russian and Belarusian operations and actions

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

to repulse the attack to stabilize the situation and to return state sovereignty to the Belarusian state authorities.<sup>12</sup>

### **A Finnish View**

From the Finnish point of view, there was hardly anything that was by itself radically new in Zapad 2013. That was reflected in the comments of Finnish Defense Minister Carl Haglund, when he soft-pedaled the issue by stressing the right of each country to exercise its armed forces.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, large-scale exercises of the Russian military with troops from other “power ministries” have been regularly conducted in different parts of Russia, including the Western Military Command, on a rotational basis every 1–4 years. In August 2008, it was from one such exercise, Kavkaz 2008, that the Russian troops continued to the pre-planned aggression against Georgia, instead of returning to their home bases in the Northern Caucasus Military District.<sup>14</sup>

Over the years, the intensity of Russian exercises has gradually grown in the vicinity of Finland. Some of the exercises have been used as test-beds for Russian command and control arrangements, including the use of modern means such as various kinds of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). Some of the exercises have been conducted to test the new military organization. The newly-established brigade organization is more flexible and fits better to operate independently with highly mobile battle groups than the previous division-based organization.<sup>15</sup> All these elements have been exercised, and not only with the other armed forces’ formations but also with other power ministries’ armed elements. Furthermore, over the last few years, plenty of new equipment has been introduced to the Russian armed forces, and that

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<sup>12</sup> Colonel General Postikov, loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Minister of Defense Carl Haglund, Nelosen uutiset, October 3, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews by the author.

<sup>15</sup> For a cautionary note on how far the restructuring has proceeded, one should be aware that “moves to create light, medium and heavy brigades remain at an experimental level,” *The Military Balance 2014*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, London, 2014, p. 162.

equipment has been tested. This is especially so with the new command and control systems.<sup>16</sup>

It is also a well-known fact that the mobilization system of the Russian Ground Forces has drastically changed in recent years. In addition to the cadre brigades, there are numerous depots and storage areas, each with sufficient equipment for a brigade-size unit or even more. Therefore, the new system has been tested in larger and smaller exercises. In areas close to the Finnish borders, the system was tested in the large exercise Ladoga 2009 and again in September 2012, when a smaller, more local exercise was held in Petrozavodsk in the Karelian Republic under the command of the Western Military District Commander. Furthermore, the local motorized rifle infantry brigade (the 4<sup>th</sup> Detached Motor Rifle Brigade) was called up from the reserves in early September 2012, brought to full readiness, and performed a combat exercise.<sup>17</sup>

In 2012, there were several additional Russian exercises not too far from the Finnish border. In September, there was a trilateral naval exercise, *The Northern Eagle 2012*, which brought together forces from Russia, Norway and the United States, and then there was a command post exercise in the Kola Peninsula in late October that same year. Earlier in 2012, on April 9–15, there was an air force exercise designated as Ladoga 2012, followed by another exercise in June 2012 at the air defense brigade level in the vast area including the Karelian Republic, Murmansk, St. Petersburg and Tver regions. In mid-October 2012, there was an artillery range firing exercise in Kirilovski (the former pre-World War II Finnish artillery training grounds called Perkjärvi).<sup>18</sup>

During 2013, in addition to the regular, pre-planned exercises, there were also several military-district-wide, unannounced combat readiness exercises—“snap inspections”—in all Russian military districts. These were launched to find out how ready the troops were on a day-to-day basis. The initiative for

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<sup>16</sup> Interview by the author.

<sup>17</sup> For all these exercises mentioned here, a reliable source is Forss et. al., *The Development of Russian Military Policy and Finland*, National Defense University, Department of Strategic And Defense Studies, Series 2: Research Reports No. 49, Annex 4, “Experiences and Conclusions of the Russian Military Exercises since 2009,” pp. 93–100.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

arranging such tests apparently came all the way from the top, from President Vladimir Putin and the new Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who in November 2012 had replaced Minister Anatoly Serdyukov.

The largest of the snap inspections was launched on July 13, 2013 in the Eastern and Central Military Districts, and its focus was on ground forces readiness. It was designed to test the ground forces mobilization and deployment system, and it involved as many as 160,000 troops in those two huge Military Districts. Before that, the Southern Military District had conducted one snap inspection on March 31, 2013, and its focus was on airborne and naval units. It involved just 7,000 troops. Then, on May 27, 2013, a snap inspection was launched in the Western Military District, involving about 8,700 troops from air and air defense units.<sup>19</sup>

Common to all of these unannounced readiness exercises was that President Putin and the highest military command wanted to see how readily deployable the various parts of the Russian military system were and how confident the political leadership could be that the military could be used in rapidly emerging conflicts. Judging from their public comments, it seems that in general they were quite satisfied with how the system responded.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Nuts and Bolts**

It is useful to examine Zapad 2013 in that context. Under the direct interest and involvement of President Putin and Defense Minister Shoigu, the Russian military capabilities were improving, the military was in the process of being restructured, and the combat forces were tested and exercised.

By any scale of measurement, Zapad 2013 was an exceptionally large military exercise. Its predecessor, Zapad 2009, had included only about 20,000 troops. The Russian declaration to the OSCE notification regime turned out to be just the tip of the iceberg. The Russians gave the OSCE only the number of the ground forces troops involved in the exercise. They were not breaking any of

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<sup>19</sup> See the document provided to the Forum for Security Cooperation by Colonel General Alexander N. Postnikov, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> There were apparently problems with mobilization, maintenance of equipment and, above all, the capabilities of strategic mobility. Interviews conducted by the author.

the notification rules when they gave the figures separately for the two main parts of the exercise (12,900 soldiers in Belarus and 9,400 in Kaliningrad), but some have argued that it was not exactly in the spirit of the OSCE notification regulations to do so.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the ground forces units, it is now estimated that there were anywhere from 6,000 to 9,000 naval and air (including air defense) forces involved. Other troops participating in the exercise, most likely various staffs, logistics units and railroad troops from the Western Military District, numbered around 18,000–20,000. Also, the Ministry of the Interior troops and civilian defense troops involved in the exercise came up to approximately 20,000 soldiers. Furthermore, at the same time when Zapad 2013 was carried out, a separate but joint Ministry of the Interior mobilization exercise was conducted, with up to about 25,000 troops being mobilized. All in all, the number of all different troops involved in Zapad 2013 was not the OSCE-notified figure of slightly over 22,000, but rather over 70,000 troops.<sup>22</sup> Some sources put the total figure up to over 90,000, if one counts the simultaneously run interior ministry troops' mobilization exercises as being a part of Zapad 2013.

The exercise was conducted in two distinct phases. The first phase started on September 17 and lasted for about a week. It depicted a reaction to a crisis in Belarus caused by some terrorist elements and led to the creation of a joint regional grouping of Russian and Belarusian forces. The second phase took place from September 23 to September 26 and consisted of the combined Russian-Belarusian operations to contain and stabilize the crisis.

All the forces involved in the exercise were brought under the command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters in Agalotovo on the Karelian Isthmus. Exercises were conducted in three main areas of operations. The first exercise area extended about 600 km along the north-south axis and had a depth of more than 1,200 km east and northeast of the Estonian and Latvian borders. It included the areas around St. Petersburg and further west along the Karelian Isthmus toward the Finnish border. In that large area, the main ground force

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<sup>21</sup> Interviews by the author.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews by the author.

formations participating in the exercise were the 76<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division in Pskov, the 25<sup>th</sup> Detached Guards Motor Rifle Brigade in Vladimirsky Lager, and the 138<sup>th</sup> Detached Guards Motor Rifle Brigade in Kamenka.<sup>23</sup>

The second major exercise area was a huge swath of land around Moscow, starting from the Belarusian border in the west and continuing beyond Nizhniy Novgorod in the east. The sub-command to the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters was the 20<sup>th</sup> Guards Army Headquarters located at Mulino, not too far from Nizhniy Novgorod. The main formations involved from this area were the 9<sup>th</sup> Detached Motor Rifle Brigade based at Nizhniy Novgorod itself and the 6<sup>th</sup> Detached Tank Brigade from the nearby Dzhershinsk. Further west, around Moscow, the units involved were the 4<sup>th</sup> Detached Guards Tank Brigade in Naro-Fominsk, as well as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Motor Rifle Division and the 27<sup>th</sup> Detached Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, which are based south of Moscow. The 106<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division from Tula, located further south of Moscow, also saw action in the exercise.

Among some of the major actions taken during the exercise were airborne operations to demonstrate the rapid reaction forces' operational capabilities. One such operation took place from Ivanovo (approximately 350 km north of Moscow) to Pskov, which lies close to the southeastern corner of Estonia. In that operation, the major parts of a regiment were airlifted to meet with their heavy equipment. There was also another airlift of airborne troops from Pskov to reinforce the forces located in Kaliningrad.

Finally, the third major exercise area was located in Kaliningrad. There, the major troop formations involved the 79<sup>th</sup> Detached Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, the 7<sup>th</sup> Detached Guards Motor Rifle Regiment, and the 336<sup>th</sup> Detached Guards Naval Infantry Brigade. Also during this phase of the exercise, a major amphibious landing took place. According to the exercise scenario, the landing was to be supported by an airdrop of men and materiel, but apparently, due to inclement weather, that part of the exercise was cancelled. Furthermore, to support the exercise in Kaliningrad, there were naval maneuvers and live missile firings from ships in the Baltic Sea to block

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<sup>23</sup> All the specifics concerning the exercise areas and the number of troops involved are distilled from interviews conducted by the author.

off the terrorist elements and their reinforcements. The Russian naval elements were also active in the Barents Sea, practicing “wolf-pack” salvos of missiles by ships and submarines against the enemy. An interesting detail is that there was a small exercise on September 26 in Kaliningrad depicting combat in an urban environment.

According to some sources, during the active part of the exercise week, Russian nuclear forces were in a state of heightened readiness, although apparently in Zapad 2013 there were no aggressive thrusts by any part of the Russian strategic triad against neighboring countries, unlike in Zapad 2009, when there were feigned attacks against Poland by the Russian airborne nuclear elements. This time, however, there were tactical ballistic missile launches using the Iskander-M, a dual-capable missile, from their home base in Luga to a Russian firing range not far from the Estonian border. That missile’s range, depending on its payload, can cover half of Finland, all of the Baltic countries and northern Poland, as well as the Stockholm region in Sweden.<sup>24</sup>

During the active phase of Zapad 2013, the Russian armed forces also carried out strategic bomber activity along the Finnish eastern border all the way up to the Barents Sea, where the bombers proceeded with live target firings. But this time there were apparently no feigned thrusts towards the Finnish border, as had been the case in many of the previous exercises.<sup>25</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As is the case with military exercises in general, the Russian exercises are important because they reveal where, against whom, and with what kinds of capabilities Russia is prepared to use its military forces. So it was with Zapad 2013. Though the exercise scenario and the force strengths submitted to the OSCE notification regime envisioned a penetration of terrorist elements and units into Belarus, Zapad 2013’s territorial coverage, scope of operations, and

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<sup>24</sup> Interviews by the author. See also Forss, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Interviews by the author.

the number of units and force types involved strongly indicate that Russia was training its forces for a large-scale conflict against a conventional enemy.<sup>26</sup>

Beyond this general point it is also clear that the troop strength the Russian authorities declared to the OSCE and the NATO-Russia Council was considerably below their real strength. The actual number of troops in the exercise through its various phases seems to have been 4-5 times as high as the number given in official Russian briefings. The exercise was split into smaller parts, and these parts were connected to each other.

As to the nature of the operations conducted in Zapad 2013, while the official exercise description talked about counter-terrorist operations, the Russian forces carried out typical conventional military operations, including rapid reaction force operations, airborne operations, tactical operations, and amphibious operations. Naval maneuvers and live missile firings were carried out in the Baltic and Barents Seas, and, in a spectacular case, Iskander-M missiles were fired from one shooting range to another. Nuclear forces were put on combat readiness, and strategic bomber flights took place along the Finnish eastern border to their live firing ranges in the Barents Sea. All of this strongly indicates that the Zapad 2013 exercise went far beyond counter-terrorist operations.

Who, then, was depicted as an enemy in the Zapad 2013 exercise? From all available evidence it was first and foremost the Baltic countries' troops backed by other NATO forces thrusting toward Belarus and Kaliningrad. But quite intriguingly, Finnish troops were also depicted as attacking the Russian positions on the Karelian Isthmus. This is particularly puzzling, since Finland has, over the past two decades, time and again, stressed its military non-alignment, and the Finnish political leadership has bent over backwards trying to make sure that the Finnish position was crystal clear: membership in NATO for Finland is not in the cards.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, in Russian military planning Finland does not seem to receive any special classification for being militarily non-aligned. While visiting Helsinki in June

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<sup>26</sup> The same conclusion is drawn by Stephen Blank, "What do the Zapad 2013 Exercises Reveal? (Part Two)," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, October 9, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see Pauli Järvenpää, "Sitting on the Fence," <[www.icds.ee](http://www.icds.ee)>.

2012, General Nikolai Makarov, then Chief of the Russian Defense Staff, chastised the Finns for carrying out their own, strictly national military exercises in the vicinity of the Russian border. Furthermore, in his opinion, NORDEFCO (Nordic Defense Cooperation) was considered a threat to Russia. He also warned Finland, in tough turns of phrase, not to entertain thoughts of joining NATO. So did Defense Minister Shoigu, when he visited Helsinki in May 2013. Both men spiced up their warnings with the threat of dire consequences—strengthening of Russian forces near the Finnish borders—should Finland not heed their advice. Minister Shoigu went even as far as tying the possible Finnish membership in NATO to the modernization of Russian sub-strategic nuclear weapons in the Western Military District.<sup>28</sup> All in all, it seems that Finland now lives in the worst of all the possible worlds: Russia regards Finland as a threat, yet Finland, being outside of NATO, is not covered by the North Atlantic Alliance’s Article V security guarantee.

Beyond the military exercises, there has also been a surge of other Russian military activities in the Baltic Sea area. The Swedish air force experienced a shock on Good Friday in 2013, when two Russian bombers, escorted by four fighters, simulated an air attack on Swedish territory, primarily on Gotland in the middle of the Baltic Sea. Around the same time, there was a probe against Stockholm, and in that attack the Russian bombers apparently simulated a nuclear attack against targets in the Stockholm area.<sup>29</sup>

It might be, as two respected diplomats argue in a recent article, that the Russian operational interests are in the south and their strategic interests in the east, but it is also true that President Putin and his defense ministers have put special effort into developing Russian military capabilities in the Western Military District.<sup>30</sup> What Zapad 2013 has amply demonstrated is that there is growing sophistication in Russia’s military capabilities, including the command, control and communications systems. In the ground forces, the transformation to a combined-arms brigade structure is proceeding, albeit more slowly than originally envisaged. Also, interoperability with other government power ministries is improving in leaps and bounds.

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<sup>28</sup> "Venäjän puolustusministeri välytti ydinasetta," *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 29, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> "Övade med kärnvapen mot svenska mål," *Expressen*, March 29, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Örjar Berner and Rene Nyberg, "Venäjän uhkaa ei ole syytä liioitella," May 6, 2013. Berner and Nyberg are former ambassadors to Moscow from Sweden and Finland, respectively.

In sum, the overall reform aimed at developing better-trained, better-equipped and better-led smaller and more mobile forces is well under way in Russia. It is clear that the Russian forces are steadily marching toward that goal. It is also obvious that the 500 billion euros planned for the development of the military forces is producing results. It is a long-term work in progress but, as Zapad 2013 demonstrated, that work is proceeding and is producing a new military reality on the ground.

# Zapad 2013 as a Form of Strategic Communication

*Dr. Ieva Bērziņa*

## Introduction

The Zapad (“West”) 2013 military exercise should be viewed as one of the elements in Russia’s broader attempt to restore its military power, which had deteriorated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In recent years, Russia and its partners have significantly increased the number of their military exercises each year. In recent years, the most notable wide-ranging training exercises in the various military districts of Russia have included Zapad 2009, Vostok (“East”) 2010, Centr (“Center”) 2011, Shchit Sojuza (“Union Shield”) 2011, Kavkaz (“Caucasus”) 2012, Zapad 2013 and Vostok 2014.

The joint Russian-Belarusian Zapad military exercises began in 2009, after the two governments signed a mutual agreement to conduct of such activities every other year. Thus, Zapad 2013 was a scheduled joint training event for the two countries’ armed forces. Still, taking into consideration the magnitude of Zapad 2013, and its location on the borders of the eastern members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the exercise must also be considered a form of communication. The aim of this chapter is to analyze Zapad 2013 from this very perspective. The analysis of the communicative aspects of Zapad 2013 is based on an understanding that strategic communication “applies not only to information, but also [to] physical communication—action that conveys meaning.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the main question addressed in this chapter relates to what Zapad 2013 means for different target audiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense. (December 2009). Reports on Strategic Communication.

## The Official Narrative of Zapad 2013

### *Terrorism*

The Russian authorities declared that a main element of the Zapad 2013 exercise would constitute a simulated response to international terrorism—a seemingly reasonable means of maintaining constructive relations with the West. None of the sides could object to fighting terrorists since this is a common issue of concern. According to the official Zapad scenario, extremist groups and gangs infiltrated the territory of the Republic of Belarus with the aim of conducting terrorist attacks and destabilizing the country.<sup>2</sup> However, Western military experts who analyzed Zapad 2013, paid attention to the actual military capabilities being exercised during the drills instead of the officially declared scenario. As such, they came to the conclusion that the scope of the exercises exceeded anti-terrorist operations.<sup>3</sup> The mismatch between the official statements and the actual activities lies at the core of the Zapad 2013 communication and will be explained in detail below.

### *Hidden Foreign Interference*

The scenario stated that the terrorists were given external support in the form of logistics as well as supplies of arms and military equipment.<sup>4</sup> This could be interpreted as a reference to the destabilization strategies used by the West in

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. (September 18, 2013). Sovmestnoye rossisko-belorusskoe strategicheskoe uchenie “Zapad-2013” [Joint Russian-Belarusian strategic exercise “Zapad-2013”]. *Mil.ru*. Retrieved from

[http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=11844520@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=11844520@egNews).

<sup>3</sup> Neretnieks, K. (2013). Zapad 13 – Observations and perspective. *The Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences*. Retrieved from <http://kkrva.se/zapad-13-observations-and-perspective/>;

Blank, S. (October 4, 2013). What do the Zapad 2013 exercises reveal? (Part one). *Eurasia Daily Monitor 10 (177)*, *The Jamestown Foundation*. Retrieved from

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=41449&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=0222ae391ceb0f106b34198c993568bb#.UwNVr4UoNEt](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41449&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=0222ae391ceb0f106b34198c993568bb#.UwNVr4UoNEt);

Blank, S. (October 9, 2013). What do the Zapad 2013 exercises reveal? (Part two). *Eurasia Daily Monitor 10 (180)*, *The Jamestown Foundation*. Retrieved from

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=41463&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=ef88f22b87e0484bb1a04f6d041e91f2#.UwOSaIUoNEt](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41463&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=ef88f22b87e0484bb1a04f6d041e91f2#.UwOSaIUoNEt).

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. (September 18, 2013).

foreign countries, which Russia considers a threat to its security.<sup>5</sup> It can be assumed that the scenario was based on the example of intervention in Libya and Syria.<sup>6</sup> However, the premise that the Zapad 2013 scenario was connected with the conflict in Syria was officially denied.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the editor-in-chief of the *Nacionalnaya Oborona* (“National Defense”) magazine, Igor Korotchenko, admitted that the military always practices scenarios that could potentially occur<sup>8</sup> and, therefore, an attack with indirect foreign interference is being treated as a possible threat.

### *Modern Military Technology and Cooperation With Partners*

Zapad 2013 was also a platform for the showcasing of new types of military tactics, including cyber defense, and the latest models of weapons and military equipment produced by the Russian and Belarusian military-industrial complex.<sup>9</sup> The importance of building military power was mentioned in President Vladimir Putin’s June 7, 2013, address to military officers:

An absolute priority for us is to expand cooperation with allies, primarily with the member states of the CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organization]. This autumn, the tactics and the coordination of joint actions will be verified during the Russian and Belarusian strategic exercises Zapad 2013. We intend to continue to grow the

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<sup>5</sup> Tkachenko, S. (2011) *Informacionnaja voina protiv Rosii*. [Information Warfare Against Russia]. Sankt-Peterburg: Piter [Санкт-Петербург: Питер]; Minasyan, G., Voskanyan, A. (2013) *Zarubezhnije NPO – mehanizm vlijaniya na vnutrennyy politiku SNG* [Foreign NGO – Mechanism of Influence on Domestic Politics of the CIS], *Obozrevatel* [Observer], No.3, March, available on-line (23.08.2013) <http://www.cisatc.org/134/157/552.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Blank, October 4, 9, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> RIA Novosti. (September 16, 2013). *Scenarii uchenij “Zapad-2013” ne budet svjazan s konfliktom v Sirii* [The scenario of “Zapad-2013 will not be associated with the conflict in Syria]. RIA.ru. Retrieved from: [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20130916/963598737.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20130916/963598737.html).

<sup>8</sup> Video Voice of Russia. (September 27, 2013). “Zapad-2013”: *blestjaschije uspehi rossijskoi armii* [“Zapad-2013”: brilliant achievements of the Russian army]. YouTube. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kceZ7ovzqDg>.

<sup>9</sup> Ostrina, S. (2013, October 2). *Uchenija “Zapad-2013” i inovacii v voennom dele* [Exercise “Zapad-2013” and innovation in the military]. *Voенно-politicheskoe obozrenie*. Retrieved from <http://www.belvpo.com/ru/30279.html>.

defense potential of the country and to carry out an ambitious program of military construction.<sup>10</sup>

Strengthening military cooperation between the states of the CSTO is, indeed, one of the important goals of the large-scale military drills carried out by Russia and its partners. Zapad 2013 was focused on the Russian and Belarusian military partnership, but a further goal remains the creation of a regional grouping of the armed forces of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Tajikistan.<sup>11</sup> It should be mentioned that the militaries of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were also present at Zapad 2013. Their participation fell under the framework of the Vzaimodeistviye (“Interaction”) 2013 military training of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) of the CSTO, which was conducted within a single operational and strategic background with maneuvers at Zapad 2013.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Zapad 2013 has to be assessed, not as a separate event, but in the context of the strengthening of Russia’s military in the Eurasian space as was defined in President Putin’s September 2013 Valdai speech.<sup>13</sup>

### *Defensive Nature*

The official Russian and Belarusian narrative of Zapad 2013 emphasized the peaceful intentions of the exercises. The training was defensive in nature, according to its organizers—including in speeches by the commanders-in-chief of the Russian and Belarusian Armed Forces as well as and the ministers of defense of both countries. In the words of President Putin, Zapad 2013 was a test of the defense capabilities of Russia and Belarus, and an assessment of

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<sup>10</sup> Kremlin. (June 7, 2013). Vstrecha s officerami, naznachennimi na visshie komandnije dolzhnosti [Meeting with officers appointed to senior command positions]. Kremlin.ru. Retrieved from <http://kremlin.ru/news/18278>.

<sup>11</sup> RIA Novosti. (November 19, 2013). Rossiya sformirujet jediniye sistemi protivovzdušnoi aboroni s Armeniyei i Kazahstanom [Russia will be forming united air defense systems with Armenia and Kazakhstan]. RIA.ru Retrieved from [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20131119/978064313.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20131119/978064313.html).

<sup>12</sup> Ostrina, October 2, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Kremlin. (September 19, 2013). Zasedaniye mezhdunarдного diskusionnogo kluba „Valdai” [Meeting of the international discussion club “Valdai”]. Kremlin.ru. Retrieved from <http://kremlin.ru/news/19243>.

the state of readiness of their armed forces and other military structures.<sup>14</sup> The peaceful nature of Zapad 2013 was also highlighted by the president of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who stressed that Belarus does not consider any country an enemy, and it does not want to threaten anybody. According to President Lukashenka, Belarus has a defense doctrine, and this is clearly defined by law.<sup>15</sup> Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated that the main goal of Zapad 2013 was to train the application of the armed forces of Russia and Belarus in the interests of ensuring the military security of the Union State.<sup>16</sup> Belarus's Minister of Defense Yuri Zhadobin added to this by noting that Zapad 2013 was carried out within the framework of international and regional agreements on disarmament and verification of activities in order to build confidence and security within the framework of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).<sup>17</sup>

### *Transparency*

Transparency and openness also featured prominently in the Zapad 2013 organizers' official narrative, and they were used to assert the non-aggressive nature of the military exercise. Defense Minister Zhadobin announced that Belarus demonstrated transparency and an aspiration for regional security by inviting foreign representatives of the Military Diplomatic Corps, accredited at the Ministry of Defense, along with envoys from neighboring countries—Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine—to observe the active phase of the

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<sup>14</sup> Kremlin. (September 26, 2013). Vystupitelnoje slovo na soveschanih o predvaritelnykh itogakh sovmestnykh rossijsko-belaruskikh uchenij "Zapad-2013" [Opening remarks at the meeting on the preliminary results of the joint Russian-Belarusian training "Zapad-2013"]. *Kremlin.ru*. Retrieved from <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/19292>.

<sup>15</sup> Otdel mezhdunarodnoi zhizni. (February 27, 2013). "Zapad-2013" ne ugroza ["Zapad-2013" is not a threat]. *Krasnaya Zvezda*. Retrieved from <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/7701-zapad-2013-ne-ugroza>.

<sup>16</sup> Oruzhije Rossii. (October 19, 2013). MO Rossii: Sergey Shoigu podvel itogi sovmestnogo strategicheskogo uchenija "Zapad 2013" [Ministry of Defense: Sergey Shoigu summed up joint strategic exercise "Zapad 2013"]. *Arms-expo.ru*. Retrieved from <http://www.arms-expo.ru/049057054048124051051053055048.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Belta Video. (August 28, 2013). Belarus priglasila zarubezhnykh nabludatelei na aktivnuju fazu uchenija "Zapad-2013" [Belarus has invited foreign observers to the active phase of exercise "Zapad-2013"]. *YouTube*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qDfgVY6uII&feature=youtu.be>.

exercise.<sup>18</sup> Zhadobin's Russian counterpart, Minister Shoigu invited representatives from the United States to observe Zapad 2013 and pledged that the practice of inviting international observers will be broadened in the future.<sup>19</sup> Nacionalnaya Oborona's editor-in-chief, Igor Korotchenko, offered the fact of the presence of the foreign military attachés at the exercise as direct evidence that Zapad 2013 was being carried out with absolute transparency.<sup>20</sup> This purportedly open nature of Russian and Belarusian military cooperation was further stressed by Lukashenka the following December:

We continue to cooperate in the military-industrial sphere, and we do not hide it, we do not move away from these issues. You have heard how much loud noise was made about our presence with the president of Russia at the Zapad 2013 training. But it is our openness. We will defend the interests of our states and our citizens very firmly and decisively by providing for the defense of Russia and Belarus.<sup>21</sup>

The message about the mutual transparency of the military exercises by NATO and Russia were even echoed by the Alliance's then-Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in his opening remarks to the October 2013 NATO-Russia Council defense ministerial:

We have also made important first steps towards greater transparency in our military activities. Last month, NATO officials observed the Russian and Belarusian exercise Zapad 2013. And next month, we expect to welcome Russian observers at Exercise Steadfast Jazz in Latvia and Poland.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Belta Video, August 28, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> RIA Novosti. (August 9, 2013). SShA reshili prinjat uchastije v uchenijah "Zapad-2013", soobshil Shoigu [USA decided to take part in training "Zapad-2013", announced Shoigu]. *RIA.ru*. Retrieved from [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20130809/955457679.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20130809/955457679.html).

<sup>20</sup> Voice of Russia, September 27, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Kremlin. (December 25, 2013). Zajavlenija dlja pressi po itogam zasedanija Visshego Gosudarstvennogo Soveta Sojuznogo gosudarstva Rossii i Belorusii [Statements to the press after a meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State of Russia and Belarus]. *Kremlin.ru*. Retrieved from <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/19923>.

<sup>22</sup> NATO (October 23, 2013). Opening remarks by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. *NATO.int*. Retrieved from [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_104372.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_104372.htm?selectedLocale=en).

## *NATO Activities on the Borders of Russia and Its Partners*

At the same time, the Russians are well aware of the message large military drills are sending to their opponents. For instance, in the information about Zapad 2009, prepared by the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, it was admitted that the Zapad 2009 military training made the NATO countries nervous because new and contemporary armaments were used.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the Schit Sojuza 2011 military exercise was held away from NATO's borders. The chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Army General Nikolay Makarov, said that such a decision was made to demonstrate the transparency and peaceful policy of the Union State, as well as the defensive nature of the regional grouping of the armed forces.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, why was Zapad 2013 carried out so close to the borders of NATO countries?

The answer was given by the chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Belarus and the first deputy minister of defense of Belarus, Petr Tihonovsky. He explained that after the controversial reaction of the neighboring Western countries to Zapad 2009, Russia and Belarus took their concerns into consideration and held the 2011 military exercises away from the borders of NATO. They expected that NATO would then behave in the same manner; but in the view of the Belarusian official, military activity by NATO countries on the borders of Belarus increased from 2010 to 2012. As a result, it was decided to carry out the large-scale Zapad 2013 exercises in Belarus. The decision was based on the principles of defense sufficiency and strategic deterrence, in the interests of demonstrating a determination to ensure the security of the country.<sup>25</sup> The officially emphasized defensive character of

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<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. (November 14, 2010). Uchenija "Zapad-2009" [Exercise "Zapad-2009"]. *Mil.ru*. Retrieved from <http://мультимедиа.минобороны.рф/multimedia/view.htm?id=1266@morfVideoAudioFile>.

<sup>24</sup> RIA Novosti. (August 26, 2011). Rossiysko-belarusskiye uchenija "Shchit-2011" proidut v dali ot granic NATO [Russian-Belarusian training "Shchit-2011 will take place away from NATO borders]. *RIA.ru*. Retrieved from [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20110826/424354953.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20110826/424354953.html).

<sup>25</sup> Kandral, I. (June 7, 2013). Zapad-2013 – uchenije oboronitel'nogo haraktera [Zapad 2013 – exercise of defensive nature]. *Belarusskaya voyennaya gazeta*, 104. Retrieved from <http://vsr.mil.by/2013/06/07/zapad-2013%E2%80%AF-uchenije-oboronitel'nogo-xarakter/>.

Zapad 2013, in combination with its military magnitude, fit well within the concept of strategic deterrence.

### **Strategic Deterrence—The Main Goal of Zapad 2013**

Russia has regularly relied on strategic deterrence to ensure the implementation of its interests in contemporary global circumstances. Thus, during the Zapad 2013 military exercise, the authorities elaborated on the mechanisms and options for joint action by the armed forces of Belarus and Russia, in the interest of the strategic deterrence of aggression against the Union State.<sup>26</sup>

Deterrence is a strategy for combining two competing goals: countering an enemy and avoiding war. Academics have explored countless variations on that theme, but the basic concept is quite simple: an enemy will not strike if it knows the defender can defeat the attack or can inflict unacceptable damage in retaliation.<sup>27</sup>

Russia has planned comprehensive strategic deterrence measures for preventing military conflicts. These are based on political, diplomatic and economic measures, which are closely related to military, information and other measures. These activities aim to convince potential aggressors that putting any form of pressure on Russia or its allies is futile.<sup>28</sup> The concept of strategic deterrence determines the logic of the communication of Zapad 2013: the scope of the military exercise and the military capabilities themselves were meant to demonstrate Russia's ability to strike, but the public interpretations

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<sup>26</sup> Belta. (September 26, 2013). Belarus i Rossiya uspeshno zavershili sovmestnoye strategicheskoye ucheniye "Zapad-2013" [Belarus and Russia have successfully completed a joint strategic exercise "Zapad-2013"]. *Belta.by*. Retrieved from [http://www.belta.by/ru/all\\_news/president/Belarus-i-Rossija-uspeshno-zavershili-sovmestnoe-strategicheskoe-uchenie-quotZapad-2013quot\\_i\\_647424.html](http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/president/Belarus-i-Rossija-uspeshno-zavershili-sovmestnoe-strategicheskoe-uchenie-quotZapad-2013quot_i_647424.html).

<sup>27</sup> Betts, R. K. (March–April 2013). The lost logic of deterrence: what the strategy that won the Cold War can – and can't – do now. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138846/richard-k-betts/the-lost-logic-of-deterrence>.

<sup>28</sup> Gerasimov, V. (February 5, 2014). Generalniy shtab i oborona strani [General Staff and the defense of the country]. *Voyenno-promishlenniy kuryer*, 4 (522). Retrieved from <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/18998>.

of the exercises then have to soften tensions with the West to avoid actual military conflict breaking out (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Zapad 2013 as a Strategic Deterrence Instrument**

<b>What must be communicated:</b>	<b>Communicated by:</b>
<b>DEFENSIVE NATURE</b>	Official statements
<b>OFFENSIVE CAPABILITY</b>	Actual military capability

The complex nature of the communication of Zapad 2013 reflected Moscow’s attempt to simultaneously maintain mutual cooperation between the West and Russia, while mindful of the possible hostility present beneath the surface of official statements (see Figure 1). Thus, on the one hand, both sides were willing to embrace transparency in regard to the military exercise, in order to decrease tensions. And fighting terrorism—the publicly proclaimed scenario for the Zapad 2013 exercise—appeared to be a rationale that both Russia and the West could accept as positive and fully legitimate. On the other hand, the Zapad exercise’s scenario also specified that the invading terrorist forces were externally supported in order to sow controlled chaos in opposing countries. In other words, the Russian-Belarusian forces training during the exercise were specifically reacting to a simulated attempt by outside powers to provoke internal disorder and the possible overthrow of government structures by destroying the internal stability of the state. And the implied outside powers in this scenario clearly pointed to the West.<sup>29</sup>

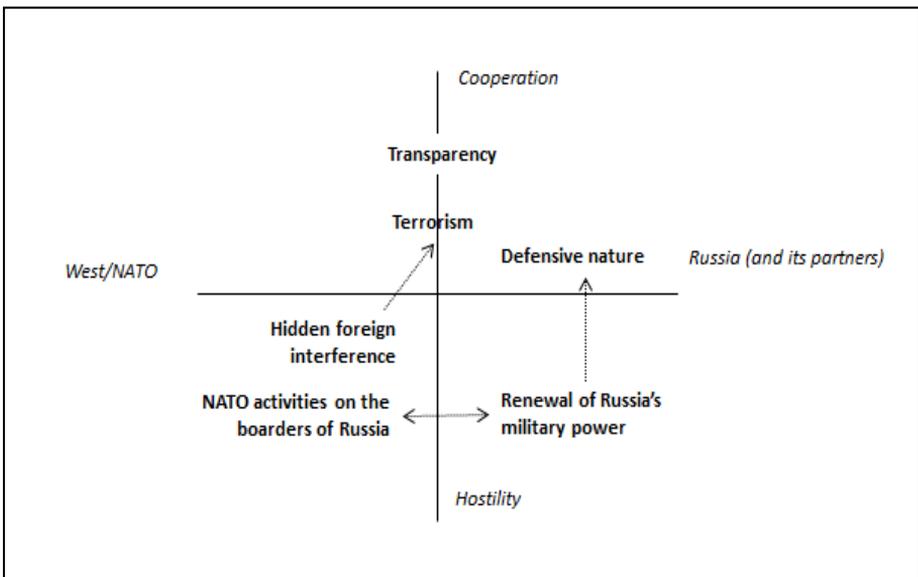
Moscow considers surreptitious foreign interference to be one of the major threats to Russia’s national interests, and many in Russia perceive it as a tool used by the West to maintain global domination.<sup>30</sup> This explains why the

<sup>29</sup> Miranovich, G. (January 30, 2014). *Oborona strani: nauchnyi podhod* [Defense of the country: a scientific approach]. *Krasnaya Zvezda*. Retrieved from <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/component/k2/item/14078-oborona-strany-nauchnyi-podkhod>.

<sup>30</sup> Tkachenko, 2011; Minasyan, G., Voskanyan, A. (2013) *Zarubezhnije NPO – mehanizm vlijaniya na vnutrennyy politiku SNG* [Foreign NGO – Mechanism of Influence on Domestic Politics of the CIS], *Obozrevatel* [Observer], No.3, March, available on-line (23.08.2013) <http://www.cisatc.org/134/157/552.html>.

Zapad 2013 scenario’s background narrative specifically described external support for the “terrorists,” and it justified the fact that the military capabilities examined during the exercise far exceeded ones necessary for regular counterterrorist operations.

Furthermore, the actual military capabilities demonstrated during Zapad 2013 sent an indirect message to the West in terms of strategic deterrence. This message was received and understood by Western military analysts and officials of neighboring countries, who seriously questioned the defensive nature of Zapad 2013—although the official discourse between the West and Russia remained within the polite framework of mutual cooperation. Nonetheless, the main tension between the two sides relates to NATO enlargement as well as Alliance activities on the borders of Russia. Hence, Zapad 2013 was meant to communicate a deterrence capability and Moscow’s ability to counterbalance the West in the international arena by the September exercise clearly showcasing Russia’s military power.



**Figure 1: The Complex Nature of Zapad 2013 Communication**

## What Did Zapad 2013 Mean for Neighboring Countries?

### *References to the Soviet Past and Military Heritage*

At a symbolic level, the Zapad exercises have regularly referenced Soviet military heritage and its continuity, since the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union had historically executed military drills under the same name. For instance, four years prior to the 2013 western military drills, then Commander of the Moscow Military District Valery Gerasimov compared the scale of the Zapad 2009 exercise, with Zapad 84, which also took place in Belarus.<sup>31</sup> Zapad 2009 was organized in the same places where, in the words of Gerasimov, “during the Great Patriotic War our fathers and grandfathers fought with fascists and freed the territory of Belarus.”<sup>32</sup> To further strengthen the historical dimension of Zapad 2009, World War II veterans were invited to visit the training sites and to meet with its participants.<sup>33</sup> However, the glorification of Russia’s Soviet past is one of the main causes of anxiety for the Baltic States and Poland. These post-Soviet republics and former Eastern Bloc satellites continue to fear that Russia may be inspired by its own rhetoric to lay renewed claims on these countries as former parts of the Soviet Union and as part of Moscow’s sphere of influence—Russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine can only underscore such fears.

### *Rebirth of Cold War Rhetoric*

One can also find similarities between Zapad 2009, 2013 and Zapad 84 in terms of the clash of narratives. In his memoirs, Soviet Army General Valentin Varennikov writes that Zapad 84 had an important military and political significance. The aim of the training was to demonstrate the firm commitment of the Soviet Union to resist the aggressive plans of the United States and NATO, and the readiness to respond to their military preparations.<sup>34</sup> And today, the contradictory narratives that Russia and its neighboring countries

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<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, November 14, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Varennikov, V. (2001). *Nepovtorimoye. Kniga 4* [Unrepeatable. The Book 4]. Retrieved from <http://litrus.net/book/read/1932?p=37>.

have about Zapad 2013, to a large degree resemble the ones of the Cold War era related to Zapad 84. According to Varennikov:

The Western propaganda focused attention on the offensive nature of the exercises, which was attributed to a sharp increase in the military power of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union. The comments falsely stated that the Soviet Union has adopted the concept of the “blitzkrieg” as the basis of its development, and absolutely nothing was said about the defensive nature of our troops in the initial period of this “war.”<sup>35</sup>

### *Intimidation*

The positions of officials from the Baltic States and Poland have constructed a united narrative about the Zapad 2013 exercises. In essence, it consists of concerns that joint Russian and Belarusian military training destabilizes the security environment in the Baltic Sea region. They also express doubt in the defensive nature of the exercises. The Polish press has stated that, according to some reports, the scenario of Zapad 2013 included attacks on the Baltic States and a preventive nuclear attack on Poland.<sup>36</sup> Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves has also stated that, during Zapad 2013, Russia practiced conquering the Baltic States.<sup>37</sup> Estonian Defense Minister Urmas Reinsalu added to this by commenting that Zapad 2013 was not transparent, and that a counterterrorism operation simulated by the exercise was then escalated into a simulated conflict with NATO members.<sup>38</sup> Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks questioned the defense-oriented goals of Zapad 2013 by analyzing the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Polska Times. (April 3, 2013). Belarus to rehearse nuclear attack on Warsaw. *Stratrisk.com*. Retrieved from <http://stratrisk.com/geostrat/11681>; Rzeczpospolita. (September 23, 2013). Uchenija “Zapad-2013” napravleni protiv Polshi [Exercises “Zapad-2013” directed against Poland]. *Ru.delfi.lt*. Retrieved from <http://ru.delfi.lt/abroad/belorussia/rzeczpospolita-ucheniya-zapad-2013-napravleny-protiv-polshi.d?id=62415327#ixzz2rzLyF81i>.

<sup>37</sup> LETA. (September 19, 2013). Russia and Belarus to begin large-scale military exercises on Baltic borders. *Leta.lv*. Retrieved from <http://www.leta.lv/eng/home/important/455625DA-0D2A-4A3F-8FEF-1E854CD9662F/>.

<sup>38</sup> ERR. (September 20, 2013). Russian military exercise focuses on Western nations, says Reinsalu. *News.err.ee*. Retrieved from <http://news.err.ee/v/politics/df1e982a-c721-46ac-85aa-af0b7eae352b>.

actual activities of the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>39</sup> Concerns about the lack of transparency of Zapad 2013 were also expressed by Lithuanian Defense Minister Juozas Olekas and Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics.<sup>40</sup>

The concentration of Russian military power near the borders of the Baltic States and Poland is disturbing for the officials of these states. The Western geopolitical orientation of the Baltic States and Poland is the main guarantee of their independence from Russia, and it explains the sharp reaction of these countries to Zapad 2013 and other similar exercises. But, from the perspective of Russian strategy, the alarming reactions of the Baltic States and Poland was the necessary effect, because the intimidation of an adversary is a very important element of the strategy of deterrence. The West is Russia's main opponent, but the Baltic States and Poland play the role of the Achilles heel in this game, due to their geographic location, common history with Russia, small military power, energy dependence, presence of a Russian diaspora and other factors.

### *Arrogance*

Since the main aim of strategic deterrence is avoiding actual military conflicts, it is more likely that Russia did not have actual intentions of intervening militarily in the Baltic States and Poland (although this should now be viewed in a different light after the annexation of Crimea and ongoing war in Ukraine's Donbas region). Therefore, the opinions of officials from neighboring countries about Zapad 2013 were publicly being treated as ridiculous in Russia. For instance, Russian military expert Igor Korotchenko characterized the reactions of the Baltic States' officials as "political horror stories," irresponsible statements and lies. In his opinion, the politicians from

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<sup>39</sup> Sargs.lv. (September 20, 2013). Latvian Defense Minister questions defense-oriented goals of Zapad'13 military exercise. *Sargs.lv*. Retrieved from [http://www.sargs.lv/Zinas/Military\\_News/2013/09/20-01.aspx#lastcomment](http://www.sargs.lv/Zinas/Military_News/2013/09/20-01.aspx#lastcomment).

<sup>40</sup> Lithuania Tribune. (September 21, 2013). Lithuania lacks transparency in Russia-Belarus war exercise "Zapad 2013". *Lithuaniantribune.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.lithuaniantribune.com/51277/lithuania-lacks-transparency-in-russia-belarus-war-exercise-zapad-2013-201351277/>; BNN. (April 24, 2013). Foreign Minister calls Russia to be more open about "Zapad 2013" military exercises. *Bnn-news.com*. Retrieved from <http://bnn-news.com/foreign-minister-calls-russia-open-zapad-2013-military-exercises-93696>

neighboring countries should not come up with such announcements, because their military attachés had a chance to see and document Zapad 2013.<sup>41</sup>

In response to the concerns expressed by Defense Minister Olekas, the Russian Embassy to Lithuania announced that the Lithuanian minister of defense should look online for specific information regarding the exercise because the Russian Ministry of Defense publishes all the updated information on its website on a regular basis.<sup>42</sup> The Russian Embassy to Latvia also noted that Latvian politicians—in particular, Defense Minister Pabriks—are politicizing the topic of the Zapad 2013 exercises by using the false pretense of the “Russian threat,” which is inconsistent with the spirit of Russian-Latvian relations, developing on the basis of pragmatism and mutual interest.<sup>43</sup> The essence of the Russian attitude toward the reactions of the Baltic States and Poland to Zapad 2013 can be seen in the cartoon video, “Bleed the US Congress,” posted on YouTube by Internet user Sem Rubikov.<sup>44</sup> The cartoon satirizes the fears of the Baltic States and Poland toward Russian and Belarusian military power and depicts the US as the only help for these countries.

### *(Im)Possibility of Occupation*

The arrogant attitude of Russia toward its neighbors is two-faced—on the one hand, Moscow actively intimidates the countries on its periphery, but on the other, it openly characterizes their fears as “ridiculous.” This situation has developed over time thanks to the region’s historical experiences combined with the contemporary geopolitical situation in the wider Baltic area. The tense relationship between the two sides centers on the debate about the possibility versus impossibility of occupation by Russia, which is an important

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<sup>41</sup> Video Voice of Russia, September 27, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Lithuania Tribune. (September 23, 2013). Russia: Lithuanian Defense Minister should search for Zapad 2013 info online. *Lithuaniantribune.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.lithuaniantribune.com/51436/russia-lithuanian-defense-minister-should-search-for-zapad-2013-info-online-201351436/>.

<sup>43</sup> RIA Novosti. (September 20, 2013). Posolstvo Rossiyskoi Federacii podcherknulo oboronitelnyy harakter ycheniy “Zapad-2013” [The Embassy of the Russian Federation underlined the defensive character of “Zapad-2013” exercises]. *RIA.ru*. Retrieved from [http://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20130920/964745549.html](http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20130920/964745549.html).

<sup>44</sup> Sem Rubikov. (June 30, 2013). Bleed the U S Congress. *YouTube.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjz6K8GKoFM>.

issue in the public rhetoric on both sides, and was also present in the interpretations about the aims of the Zapad 2013 exercises.

The lament over the collapse of the Soviet Union periodically expressed by Russian authorities—most famously by Vladimir Putin in his 2007 speech before the Munich security conference—is also being perceived as a potential threat in the Baltic States due to their recent liberation from the Soviet empire.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, Putin’s championing of Eurasian integration as a supposed alternative to other global power centers and a positive outcome for the entire post-Soviet space may also seem to challenge the former Soviet republics Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia’s Western geopolitical orientation.<sup>46</sup> At the same time Putin denies any possibility of the restoration of the Soviet Union:

We have no desire and aspiration to revive the Soviet empire neither politically nor in the sphere of sovereignty. It’s an obvious thing, you know? For us it is not profitable, it is impossible and not necessary.<sup>47</sup>

Eurasian ideologist Aleksandr Dugin explains the Russian attitude clearly and openly. In his opinion, the Baltic States have done everything possible to become the absolute enemies of Russia, therefore, if there are any shifts in the global power balance due to the changing role of the US, Russia will occupy the Baltic States in a soft or hard manner; but for now, such a perspective is impossible.<sup>48</sup> The membership of the Baltic States in NATO shields them from potential military aggression by Russia, and Russians are very well aware of this. Still, the concerns of the neighboring countries about Russian military

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<sup>45</sup> RIA Novosti. (February 12, 2004). Putin- razval SSSR stal obschenacionalnoi tragediyei, no nelzja zhit tolko proshlim [Putin – the breakdown of the USSR became nationwide tragedy, but you cannot live only in the past]. *RIA.ru*. Retrieved from <http://ria.ru/politics/20040212/526171.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Kremlin, September 19, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ameljshkin, K. (November 15, 2010). Esli s Ssha chto to sluchitsya, mi esche raz okkupiruem strani Baltii. Intervyu Aleksandra Dugina [If something happens with the U.S., we once again are occupying the Baltic States. The interview with Aleksandr Dugin]. *Rus.delfi.lv*. Retrieved from <http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/versions/esli-s-ssha-chto-to-sluchitsya-my-esche-raz-okkupiruem-strany-baltii-intervyu-aleksandra-dugina.d?id=35175085#ixzz2tBqZSc7x>.

exercises near their borders give Russia a chance to demonstrate its superiority and arrogance in the information space. At the same time, the sharp exchange of words between Russia on the one hand and the Baltic States and Poland on the other was more likely just a side effect of Russia's strained relations with the wider West—the main target audience for the Zapad 2013 message.

### **What Is Zapad 2013 Communicating to the West?**

When analyzing the nature of Zapad 2013, Western military experts pay attention to the actual military capabilities being exercised during the drills instead of the officially declared scenario.<sup>49</sup> The same is being done by Russian and Belarusian experts who question the transparency and defensive nature of NATO exercises. Military analysts on both sides evaluate the military exercises of their opponents as directed against each other despite the officially declared neutral scenarios.<sup>50</sup> But, until the Crimea crisis, the West and Russia were willing to officially maintain a positive diplomatic relationship and, therefore, mutually recognize the transparency and non-aggressiveness of military exercises on both sides.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, the sides play a double game—on the one hand, they are interested in cooperation and a peaceful relationship, but under the surface, a rebalancing of power is taking place. In the case of Russia, the rebirth of its military power is an important component which assigns weight to its diplomatic arguments.

Prior to the Ukraine crisis, Russian and Western relations were both dynamic and complex. The core of the problem since the collapse of the Soviet Union

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<sup>49</sup> Neretnieks, K., 2013; Blank, S. (October 4, 2013). What do the Zapad 2013 exercises reveal? (Part one). *Eurasia Daily Monitor 10 (177)*, The Jamestown Foundation. Retrieved from [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=41449&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=0222ae391ceb0f106b34198c993568bb#.UwNvr4UoNEt](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41449&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=0222ae391ceb0f106b34198c993568bb#.UwNvr4UoNEt); Blank, S., October 9, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Polozov, A. (November 12, 2013). Steadfast Jazz-2013. NATO pered broskom na vostok [Steadfast Jazz-2013. NATO before throwing to the East]. *Fond strategicheskoi kulturi*. Retrieved from <http://www.fondsk.ru/news/2013/11/12/steadfast-jazz-2013-nato-pered-broskom-na-vostok-23932.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Itar-tass. (November 9, 2013). Krupneishie s nachala veka voyenniye ycheniya NATO Steadfast Jazz zavershilis v Vostochnoi Evrope [The largest military exercises from the beginning of the century NATO Steadfast Jazz has ended in the Eastern Europe]. *Itar-tass.com*. Retrieved from <http://itar-tass.com/politika/757582>.

was whether Russia and NATO were partners or adversaries. However, the events in southeastern Ukraine as of 2014 finally clearly marked that Russia and the West stand on opposite sides of a regional standoff. Before Russia's annexation of Crimea, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to NATO, Alexandr Grushko, listed the main areas where Russia and NATO successfully cooperate as well as those where serious disagreements continue. As examples of positive cooperation, he mentioned the joint system for detecting aircraft captured by terrorists, the complex Standex project for providing physical security in public places and transport, the Open Shield counter-piracy mission, and the ensuring of security in Afghanistan. Problematic issues, on which the positions of Russia and NATO diverge, relate to the general understanding of respect for international law and the principle of the indivisibility of security, NATO enlargement, and, most importantly, ballistic missile defense.<sup>52</sup>

The main concern for Russia is to challenge and diminish the global dominance of the West. For instance, Grushko says that if NATO were to ever become one of the main pillars of a new international order and were to be fully integrated into the system of international law, then interoperability with Russia could increase. But if the Alliance seeks to play the role of the world's policeman, acting unilaterally in different situations, at its own discretion, then strong cooperation is unlikely, although the Zapad 2013 and NATO Steadfast Jazz military exercises were mentioned as successful cases where mutual transparency of activities had been achieved.<sup>53</sup> That said, the strategy of deterrence foresees a possible attack if the opponent does not respect the interests of its adversary. Therefore, the war in Ukraine is, at least in part, meant to illustrate that if the geopolitical interests of Russia are neglected by the West, it can and will react aggressively to protect them (Table 2).

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<sup>52</sup>Panyev, Y. (December 3, 2013). Alexandr Grushko: "Peregovornii process po protovoraktnoi oboroni ischerpan" [Aleksandr Grushko: "The negotiation process about ballistic missile defense is exhausted"]. *Nezavisimaya*. Retrieved from [http://www.ng.ru/world/2013-12-03/100\\_grushko.html](http://www.ng.ru/world/2013-12-03/100_grushko.html).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

**Table 2: Zapad 2013 From a Strategic Communication Perspective**

TARGET GROUPS	COMMUNICATION GOALS	MESSAGE	RESULT
<b>Domestic public</b>	To demonstrate that Russia is an important player in the global geopolitical arena, a counterweight to the West	Renewal of Russia's military power, strengthening military cooperation with partners	Zapad 2013—a huge success
<b>The Baltic States and Poland</b>	Intimidation	The Baltic States and Poland fear the military power of Russia and its partners	Growing tension in the Baltic Sea region
<b>The West/NATO</b>	Strategic deterrence	Officially declared defensive nature in combination with offensive capability	Constructive relationship after Zapad 2013, but escalation of conflict regarding Ukraine's geopolitical position

## Conclusions

From the perspective of strategic communication, Zapad 2013 first of all served as a tool for demonstrating that Russia is becoming a considerable player in the global political arena. In other words the exercise was in part meant to signal that Moscow's position must be taken into account, particularly in situations where the West and Russia have different interests and views—as in the case of the resolution of the conflict in Syria, for instance.

As such, Zapad 2013 was not simply an event of regional significance, but also a Russian message to the West in a global context.

Zapad 2013 also had a clear strategic deterrence dimension. But the logical consequence of such deterrence measures has been growing tension in the Baltic Sea region, primarily exemplified by the fears expressed by the governments of the Baltic States and Poland. Although it is unlikely that the actual revision of borders in the Baltic Sea region is Moscow's foremost foreign policy priority for now, nonetheless, this vast territory on Europe's eastern flank remains one of the West's main weak points. Thus, the Baltic region is currently quite vulnerable to intimidation by Russia.

# The Zapad 2013 Strategic Exercise and the Function of Such Exercises in the Soviet Union and Russia

*Jacob W. Kipp*

Zapad 2013, coming as it did only a few months before the Russian armed intervention in Crimea and Donbas, provides valuable insights into the readiness of the Russian Armed Forces, the sorts of conflicts for which they are training, and how such forces might be applied in the case of war. The analysis of exercises is best left to trained military observers on the ground, and the military attaches of all countries are adept at this process. This article, however, will look at Zapad 2013 in the context of past exercises.

Russian and Soviet military strategic-operational exercises have always been key elements in military training and education. The young Peter the Great's *mock troops* in the 1680s marked the beginning of professional military education and training in Russia and were the origins of the Imperial Guard regiments of the Russian Army.<sup>1</sup> Since the reign of Peter the Great from 1682 to 1725, the Russian Army has been a standing force. Both the serfs who made up the ranks of the enlisted men and the officers drawn from the gentry were expected to serve for life. During the reign of Peter III, obligatory military service for the gentry was abolished, but the tradition of service continued. The enlisted men would, however, continue to serve for 25 years, which, given illnesses in the army even in peace time, meant that most did not survive to complete their term of service, even without the risk of combat.

The westernization and militarization of Russia went hand-in-hand as Russia's rulers sought to define the empire's place in the European state system. The idea of state service was expressed in the Table of Ranks (*Tabel' o Rangakh*),

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<sup>1</sup> James Cracraft. *The Revolution of Peter the Great*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003).

introduced by Peter the Great in 1722. The Table consisted of 14 distinct ranks in the hierarchy of service for the infantry, artillery, guards, navy, civil bureaucracy and court. Military ranks carried a higher value than those of the court and civil bureaucracy. Advancement was based upon seniority and accomplishment; those in service had the opportunity to gain personal (Rank 14 in the military) and then hereditary nobility at rank V (Brigadier, Captain-Commander, Prime Major of the Guard, and Stehr-Krigskommissar).

The system stressed both state service as the chief path for advancement in Russian society and placed primacy on careers in the military.<sup>2</sup> Military training was a top priority. Generalissimo Aleksandr Suvorov stated that a commander had to treat his command with one core objective in mind: “to train hard and fight easy [*Tiazhelo v uchenii—legko v pokhode*].”<sup>3</sup> In this case, the emphasis was on the tactical preparation of the small unit for battle. As distinct from the Suvorov tradition, there was another associated with the young officers who served at the court of Pavel Peterovich (future Paul I) at Gatchina in the 1780s and 1790s, where the emphasis was on parade ground precision and order. Among those shaped by Gatchina was the Emperor Paul I, himself, Aleksei Arakcheev, the future minister of war, and the Grand Duke Nikolai Pavlovich, who would reign as Tsar Nikolai I.

The model for many of these reforms was the Prussian Army of Frederick the Great. Those influenced by Gatchina seem to have assumed that a well-regulated military was, indeed, the model for state administration and even society. In his treatment of the education of Nikolai I at Gatchina, his biographer W. Bruce Lincoln called it “the education of a drill master.”<sup>4</sup> The Gatchina system of training emphasized drills and strict order at the expense of initiative by junior officers. Many Russian officers who served in the war against Napoleon returned to Russia with liberal ideas that called into question

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<sup>2</sup> Erik Amburger, *Geschichte der Behördenorganisation Rußlands von Peter dem Großen bis 1917*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Menning. "Train Hard Fight Easy: The Legacy of A. V. Suvorov and his 'Art of Victory'," *Air University Review*, (November-December 1986), <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1986/nov-dec/menning.html> Accessed on 10 February 2014.

<sup>4</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I: Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russians*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1978). pp. 48–74.

the existence of serfdom and of Russia's autocratic state. The resulting tension led to a military revolt of reform-minded officers at the time of the death of Emperor Aleksandr I, in 1825, and the assumption of the throne by his brother, Nikolai I. Nikolai suppressed the Decembrist Revolt, hung its leaders, and exiled the rest to Siberia. The autocratic state and militarism would shape Russia, until the crisis of the battlefield made the need for reforms evident. The spirit of Gatchina found its home in the court, where form took top place over content. The spirit of Suvorov found its home in the frontier army, where actual performance in combat was prized over appearance. Long wars with Muslim mountaineers during the reign of Nikolai I provided the experience for these battle-tested troops.

Russian military exercises have followed their own calendar and geography. The calendar dictates the timing of major exercises which usually come at the end of the summer training season. This tradition goes back as far as the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the garrisons left their winter quarters for field exercises, which then culminated in a major war game. Over summer, each combat army (infantry, cavalry and artillery) engaged in its own field training and then took part in tactical actions involving combined arms. The culminating maneuvers tested the ability of senior commanders to conduct large-scale combat, highlighting tactical actions to obtain operational effects shaping the course and outcome of a campaign. In pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg, the departure was noted with a *May Parade* on the Champ de Mars. It concluded with a cavalry charge across the field that ended just in front of the reviewing stands. At the May Parade in 1827, Nicholas I reviewed 53 cavalry squadrons, 25 infantry battalions and 10 artillery batteries, which included 27 generals, 82 staff officers, 696 field officers and 26,984 enlisted men.<sup>5</sup>

If the “May Parade” was mostly spectacle, the summer training was hard work, and the war game at the end of summer was a final test for commanders and soldiers on their mastery of tactics and the art of war. For the Imperial Army, the summer camp at Krasnoe Selo was the summer military capital of the Empire. In the Crimean War, Russia’s serf-based army lost battles and proved relatively inelastic in comparison with other armies based on the universal

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<sup>5</sup> N. P. Slavitskii, "Peterburgskie parady XIX veka v periodicheskoi pechati," in: *Trista let pechati Sankt Peterburga*. (St. Peterburg, 2011), pp. 274–279, <http://istmat.info/node/22519>  
Accessed 25 March 2014.

conscription of all citizens. This exposed the need for serious reforms in many areas affecting the state, society and the military.

With the reforms of the 1860s and 1870s (including the creation of universal military service, summer training), the concluding exercises took on greater importance because the conscripts had only a short period to master their craft before being discharged into the reserves. Exercises were organized in the various military districts created under the Minister of War, Dmitry A. Miliutin. It was Miliutin who gave Russia its mobilization army, by making conscripts serve as reservists and subjecting them to recall during national a emergency. Russia's great size and the limited railway network meant that Russian mobilization could not provide the General Staff with opportunities for lightning attacks, but it could put millions of men in the field, creating the hope or fear of the Russian "steamroller." From that time forward, the General Staff became the institution that planned and directed the mobilization of the Army, its concentrations and deployment of operations in the initial period of war. The military districts served as training commands in peacetime and then fed reservists into existing units to bring them up to wartime capacity.

As warfare has grown more complex with the transformation of the instruments of war, the scope and scale of training has grown as the means and methods have changed. According to the General of the Army Makhmut Gareev, "combined-arms exercises and maneuvers" have evolved with the transformation of the means of war and have taken on the function of a test of the formations involved to conduct combined-arms combat to achieve strategic-operational objectives.<sup>6</sup> Such training is not left in the hands of the great captain but is the province of the General Staff and a testing ground for the concepts of future war.

### *Soviet Strategic-Operational Exercises and Their Uses*

The large Soviet exercises of the mid-1930s are a case in point. The grand maneuvers in the Kiev Military District in 1935 involved 65,000 Soviet troops, with over 1,000 tanks conducting an operation in which the opposing forces were seeking to cut off and take Kyiv. The maneuvers included the deployment

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<sup>6</sup> Makhmut Gareev. *Obschche-voiskovyie ucheniia*. (Moscow: Voennizdat, 1983), pp. 3–6.

of mechanized corps and a composite airborne division drop to test the concept of large-scale airborne assault. In the wake of World War I, there had been much discussion about the possibility of mechanization, leading to the articulation of the concept of small professional armies as the best vehicle for such mechanization, since they could be manned by professional soldiers, thus making conscription a thing of the past. This maneuver confirmed the need for large forces to conduct truly decisive operations.<sup>7</sup> Or in Marxist terms, quantity can have a quality all of its own. In 1936, the General Staff conducted large-scale maneuvers in the Belarusian military district, which saw 85,000 troops and more than 1,100 tanks employed to test the concepts of deep battle and deep operations, as developed in the newly issued PU-36 field regulations. The exercise saw the employment of shock, mechanized, tactical air, and airborne forces to achieve decisive offensive outcomes on the battlefield.<sup>8</sup> This involved creating a breakthrough of a prepared defense by shock troops and then unleashing a second echelon of mechanized/armored forces to go into deep exploitation. In both exercises, the Soviet state and its General Staff invited foreign military observers to view the exercises, as a calculated way of impressing foreign military specialists.<sup>9</sup>

Soviet military exercises during the Cold War also tested operational concepts and new technology, but they were kept away from the prying eyes of potential enemies. The first of such exercises testing new technology for battlefield use, was tactical in scale, with only about 4,500 troops, but was radical in content. In September 1954, at the Totskoye exercise area (Orenburg oblast, South Ural Military District), Soviet forces, under the direction of Marshal Georgy Zhukov, took part in exercise Snezhok ("Snowball"), which involved tactical maneuvers during which an atomic bomb was dropped and detonated to create a breakthrough of the enemy's defenses. A Tu-4 strategic bomber was to drop a 40-kiloton bomb, and ground troops, following an artillery barrage and attack by tactical aviation, were to maneuver through the bomb's blast area, where military equipment and livestock had been exposed to the blast. While radiation detection equipment was employed, soldiers and the local

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<sup>7</sup> "Ucheniia Kievskogo voennogo okruga 1935 goda ili Bol'shie Kievskie manevry."

<http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%>. Accessed 10 February 2014.

<sup>8</sup> "Manevry voisk Belorusskogo voennogo okruga 1936 goda," <http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/>.

Accessed 10 February 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

civilian population were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. Secrecy during the Soviet period precluded any public discussion of the consequences of such exposure to the health of troops and civilians.<sup>10</sup>

Following the creation of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (Warsaw Pact) in 1955, the Soviet General Staff developed and conducted exercises with other member states, using only Soviet forces.<sup>11</sup> Over time it became apparent that such exercises addressed two major threats: a NATO-WTO war in Europe, and the possible defection of a Soviet ally from the Communist Bloc. The Soviet Army developed specialized capabilities to support both contingencies. These instruments included airborne forces and forces of special designation (*spetsnaz*). In two cases, Warsaw Treaty Organization exercises were used in conjunction with pressure upon other alliance members. In response to the reforms undertaken in Czechoslovakia, during the Prague Spring, to create “Communism with a human face,” the Kremlin took a series of measures to apply political pressure on Prague to change its policies. At the same time, the Soviet General Staff organized large-scale maneuvers along the Soviet border as a means of signaling its concern. And if Prague did not change its policies, the Kremlin could use those forces to intervene in Czechoslovakia.

In August the order was given and Soviet, Polish and East German forces entered Czechoslovakia. Airborne and *spetsnaz* units seized Prague and replaced the Dubcek government while meeting little armed resistance. In the fall of 1968, speaking at the Congress of the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR), General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev made explicit this new mandate for Warsaw Treaty Organization forces to be used to preserve a Communist regime in the face of opposition by its own people.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Totskie voiskovye ucheniia," <http://ru.wikipedia.org/wik> Accessed 15 February 2014.

<sup>11</sup> On the history of the Warsaw Treaty Organization see: Frank Umbach, *Das rote Bündnis: Entwicklung und Zerfall des Warschauer Paktes*. (Berlin: Links Verlag, 2005), and Mastny, Vojtech and Malcolm; Byrne *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1991* (National Security Archives Cold War Readers). (Budapest: Central European University Press 2005).

<sup>12</sup> "Советские войска в цчекчословакии (1968г.)." <http://militera.lib.ru/h/20c2/09.html>, Accessed 15 February 2014.

In December 1979, on orders from the Politburo, the General Staff executed a *coup de main* against the government of Afghanistan, using the same combination of airborne and *spetsnaz* to seize Kabul and bring to power a government considered loyal to Moscow. In the Afghan case, while the seizure of power proved relatively easy, the Soviet forces soon found themselves drawn into a counterinsurgency war with the mujahedeen, which would last a decade and end with the withdrawal of Soviet forces, but the fighting in Afghanistan continuing.<sup>13</sup>

In 1981, the General Staff organized two maneuvers which combined overt training functions and covert political pressures. In June 1979, the newly elected Pope John Paul II, the former Archbishop of Kraków, Karol Józef Wojtyła, visited his native Poland and was met by enthusiastic crowds. That visit inspired the formation of *Solidarność* (Solidarity) in 1980, a trade union representing the rights of workers. It quickly became a broad-based movement demanding reforms from the Polish regime. Solidarity, like the Prague Spring, was seen as a threat to Communist rule. Moscow applied pressure to change the leadership of the PZPR to ensure a firm hand in Warsaw. Its chosen agent was General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the former minister of defense, who became prime minister in February 1981.

Jaruzelski conducted negotiations with Solidarity and the Catholic Church in search of some compromise, but Moscow wanted Jaruzelski to deal forcefully with the opposition as had been done a decade earlier. To this end, Leonid Brezhnev expressed the strong concerns of the Politburo about the events in Poland to Jaruzelski. The General Staff organized two exercises to reinforce this point. The first exercise, *Soiuz-1981*, was held in Poland in March with troops from East Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union. The subtext of the exercise was to present a choice to Poland's leadership. The choice was between imposing martial law themselves, or being subjected to fraternal assistance from their allies to restore order.

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<sup>13</sup> Lester Grau and Michael A. Gress, eds., *The Soviet General Staff, The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 15–20.

In September 1981, the General Staff conducted Zapad-1981, a very large, strategic-operational exercise involving troops along the Polish-Soviet border and naval forces in the Baltic. The assigned forces conducted offensive operations to develop a deep attack and included *spetsnaz* units of the GRU and a large-scale airborne operation at the rear of the enemy in which the 7th Guards Airborne Division dropped near Minsk. In December, Jaruzelski moved to suppress Solidarity and consolidate Communist rule. In 1992, after the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, Jaruzelski remarked during an interview that he was responding to a threat to Soviet interests, which Solidarity represented. "Given the strategic logic of the time, I probably would have acted the same way if I had been a Soviet general. At that time, Soviet political and strategic interests were threatened."<sup>14</sup>

The Velvet Revolution, which ended Communist rule in Eastern Europe in 1989, and the collapse of the Soviet Union following the Putsch of August 1991 officially put an end to the military history of the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> In 1992, a new entity, the Russian Armed Forces, was created out of the Soviet military. Although reduced in size and redeployed mostly within the frontiers of Russia, this force remained Soviet in its form, customs and traditions.<sup>16</sup> Though smaller, with an arms industry in disarray and facing hot spots within Russian territory and on its periphery, the Soviet Army effectively became the Russian Army.

In his analysis of the failed attempts to reform this army in the two decades since the end of the Soviet Union, Russian military expert Alexander Golts has argued that each plan of reform has foundered on the underlying commitment to the maintenance of state militarism by both Russia's civilian and military elites. He dated such militarism to the reign of Peter the Great and the creation of Russia's standing army and navy. The army and navy's demands upon both the state and society and their orientation toward countering external threats

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<sup>14</sup> "Das war psychische Folter: Ex-Präsident Wojciech Jaruzelski über Kriegsrecht und Interventionsgefahr in Polen 1981," *Der Spiegel*, (11 May 1992), <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13680621.html> Accessed 10 March 2014

<sup>15</sup>William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Jacob W. Kipp, "The Uncertain Future of the Soviet Military, from Coup to Commonwealth: The Antecedents of National Armies," *European Security*, I, No. 2 (Summer 1992), 207-238.

to the state led to repeated wars on Russia's periphery. In turn, this situation demanded the regimentation of society and the economy to the needs of the state. In 2011, however, Golts thought that the then-ongoing reforms toward the *New Look* might break the hold of militarism on Russian society and create a smaller professional, but functional, force.<sup>17</sup>

### *Russia's Strategic-Operational Exercises Since 1999*

The contemporary Russian Army, with its mix of conscripts (one year of service) and contract/professional personnel (*kontraktniki*) faces a particular challenge in measuring the integration of such personnel into combat units. In this context, over the last several years, President Putin has ordered the current Minister of Defense, Sergei Shoigu, and the Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, to conduct surprise tests of the combat readiness of military units, in conjunction with tactical and strategic-operational exercises, to ensure unit combat readiness. The Soviet General Staff had made such readiness tests a regular practice; and President Putin reinstated them in the aftermath of the dismissal of Minister of Defense Anatoliy Serdyukov and the removal of the Chief of the General Staff, General Nikolai Makarov, after charges of corruption and poor planning had emerged in conjunction with the effort to transform the Russian Army to a *New Look*.<sup>18</sup>

During the next summer's training cycle, following the change of leadership in the Ministry of Defense, President Putin ordered the first large-scale,

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<sup>17</sup>Alexander Golts and Tonya L. Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies: Why Military Reform Has Failed in Russia" *International Security*, volume 29, issue 2 (Fall 2004), pp. 121–158, <http://www.belfercenter.org/is/?webSyncID=7c0017a8-b3b4-02be-17cc-5d27d6d226ae&sessionGUID=0aaa254b-262a-1eae-2c7c-9b3c2928b27b>; Aleksandr Golts, *Armiia Rossii: 11 poteriannykh let*. (Moscow: Zakharov, 2004); Aleksandr Sharavin, Vladimir Dvorkin, David Khofman, Aleksandr Belkin, Aleksandr Golts and Svetlana Savranskaia, "20 let popytok reformirovaniia Rossiiskoi voennoi organizatsii, Moskovskii Tsentri Karnegi, (14 November 2011), <http://m.ceip.org/publications/?fa=46140>, Accessed 20 February 2011.

<sup>18</sup>Serdyukov's *New Look* military reforms involved reductions in the size of the officer corps, the institution of a brigade structure and the modernization of Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) to fight network-centric warfare. For more on Serdyukov's dismissal, see: Aleksandr Golts: "Reformer Dismissed. An End to the Reforms?" *Yezhednevnyi Zhurnal*, (8 November 2012); "Shoigu nachal masshtabnuiu proverku boegotovnosti voisk," *Lenta.ru*, (13 July 2013).

surprise test of combat readiness since the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> He explained this decision in terms of the pace of modernization affecting the Armed Forces. The Army and Navy must be in motion, they must move, they must improve their skills [and] knowledge. Against the background of the large-scale rearmament of the Army and Navy, exercises of such a type are especially important because it is necessary to understand how and who will use new technology under conditions of modern combat.

The geography of strategic-operational exercises reflects Russia's position as a Eurasian continental power since most of the exercises are taking place on the primary axis of potential military conflicts. Consequently the Russian General Staff labels its major exercises as Zapad (West), Vostok (East), Tsentr (Center) and Kavkaz (Caucasus), carrying the year of execution in their name. Thus, Zapad 2013 is the major strategic exercise in the western strategic direction. According to the General Staff, every exercise over the last few years has been conducted against a *hypothetical opponent*, which, in fact, resembles the primary military threat or threats in that strategic direction.

Earlier, however, Cold War realities dictated the naming of a definite opponent. Thus, Zapad-1977 and Zapad-1981 were strategic-operational exercises against NATO along the Cold War frontier of Europe. It was Soviet practice to reduce the profile of such exercises and to avoid international media. Zapad-1999, the first strategic-operational exercise conducted by the Russian General Staff, continued the practice of focusing upon the NATO threat, but involved some major changes. First, the exercise's combat operations involved the defense of Russian and Belarusian territory from attack by NATO, executed on the model of the campaign that NATO had just concluded against Yugoslavia. Second, the time and the press coverage of the exercise reflected a political desire to send a message to the North Atlantic Alliance and to the population of Russia. The date selected for the start of the exercise was June 22, with all of its emotional impact.<sup>20</sup> Third, in this exercise, Russian forces simulated a sharp break from Soviet declaratory policy of "no first use" of nuclear weapons. Russian strategic bombers simulated the first use

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<sup>19</sup>Andrei Efremov, "Kogda Armii i Flot v dvizhenii," *Fail-RF: Ezhednevnaia elektronnaia gazeta* (18 July 2012), <http://file-rf.ru/context/2719>, Accessed 20 February 2014.

<sup>20</sup> On June 22, 1941, Nazi German forces attacked and invaded the Soviet Union.

of nuclear weapons as a means of de-escalation of the conflict.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, it should also be noted that while Russia did not expect a war in the Baltics at that time, Russian politicians and military leaders were concerned about renewed fighting in the Caucasus in the summer of 1999. They were anxious about NATO's possible intervention in case of the probable renewal of fighting between the Russian Federation and President Aslan Maskhadov's unrecognized Chechen Republic, based on its intervention against Yugoslavia over Kosovo. Finally, the modern Russian experience with strategic-operational exercises is connected with the rise and consolidation of political power by Vladimir Putin, who was Secretary of the Security Council during the Kosovo campaign and Zapad-1999, and rose in the ranks rapidly thereafter to the post of Prime Minister, President-elect, and ultimately President.<sup>22</sup>

While the Zapad series of strategic exercises have continued since 1999 under that name, they have become joint Russian-Belarusian exercises and are now conducted against a "hypothetical opponent."<sup>23</sup> When Russian and Belarusian forces conduct joint strategic-operational maneuvers at exercise areas located deep inside Russia, they are called *Shield of the Union* and involve strategic defensive operations involving air defense forces.<sup>24</sup> Other major strategic-operational exercises are conducted under the names Tsentr, Vostok, and Kavkaz.

In February 2007, at the annual Munich conference on security policy, President Putin gave a forceful speech stating his opposition to a world based upon a unipolar order dominated by the United States and its allies. This order, he declared, was far from the goal of reducing conflicts and was the very source of military interventions: "Unilateral and frequently illegitimate

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<sup>21</sup> "Ot 'Zapad-1981' do 'Zapad-2009'." *Ria Novosti*, (17 September 2009), and Vasilii Izgarshev, "Zapad-1999," *Pravda.Ru*, (24 June 1999). See also: Jacob W. Kipp, "Russia's Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons," *Military Review*, (May-June 2001), No. 3, 27–38.

<sup>22</sup> Jacob W. Kipp, "Putin and Russia's War in Chechnya" in: Dale Herspring, ed., *The Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Dmitrii Kiselev et al, "Ucheniia 'Zapad 2013' napugali Evropu," *Novosti Nedeli*, (29 September 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Shchit Souiza — 2006,"

[http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A9%D0%B8%D1%82\\_%D0%A1%D0%BE%D1%8E%D0%B7%D0%B0\\_%E2%80%94\\_2006](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A9%D0%B8%D1%82_%D0%A1%D0%BE%D1%8E%D0%B7%D0%B0_%E2%80%94_2006).

actions have not resolved any problems. Moreover, they have caused new human tragedies and created new centers of tension. Judge for yourselves: wars as well as local and regional conflicts have not diminished.” Putin challenged the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s position that the NATO Council provide authorization for the use of alliance forces anywhere in lieu of a UN mandate. He called into question the wisdom of the Alliance’s continued expansion into territories that had once been part of the Soviet Union and expressed Russia’s objections to the deployment of anti-missile defense systems in Eastern Europe. Putin stated:

I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our Western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them.<sup>25</sup>

Two years later, at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, NATO did not provide Membership Action Plans (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine. The United States favored such action while Great Britain, Germany and France opposed. Instead, the Alliance agreed to return to the question in December 2008, following the US presidential elections. President Putin attended the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council. He expressed satisfaction with the decision on MAPs for Georgia and Ukraine, expressed his opinion on Kosovo’s independence from Serbia, and agreed to provide transit for NATO non-military equipment, food products, fuel and transport vehicles through Russia. It seems that at the end of the Putin presidency, NATO-Russian tensions were less acute. But the summer of 2008 proved this assessment to be wrong as a

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<sup>25</sup> President of Russian Federation, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy" *Kremlin.ru*, (10 February 2007), [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138\\_type82912type82914type82917type84779\\_118123.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml).

major crisis erupted in the Caucasus between Russia and Georgia with military exercises playing a conspicuous role.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of Kavkaz 2008, the strategic-operational exercise took place in July and was designated an “anti-terrorism exercise” conducted by Russian forces in the vicinity of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two territories in revolt at that time against the government of Georgia and in which Russian peacekeeping forces were deployed. In a tense regional environment, the Russian exercises proved provocative to the government of Georgia, which had good reason to see them as preparations for Russian military occupation of its rebellious provinces. Colonel Igor Konashenkov, the deputy to the commander of the Russian Ground Forces, noted that 8,000 troops were taking part in Kavkaz 2008, and stated that because of increased tensions along the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian–South Ossetian borders, the exercises would also address “the problem of conducting special operations to impose peace in areas of armed conflict.”<sup>27</sup>

The exercise involved the rapid deployment of a sub-unit from the 76<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division stationed at Pskov to support the 58<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, Georgian and US forces were conducting their own maneuvers, *Immediate Response*, within Georgia, which the Russian press treated as provocative.<sup>29</sup> Tensions did increase along the South Ossetian–Georgian border later in July and in early August, with exchanges of gun fire and warnings from each side.<sup>30</sup> When the government of Georgia moved its own forces, Russia’s 58<sup>th</sup> Army was in a position to intervene rapidly and decisively in South Ossetia, occupy Abkhazia, and to carry the fighting into Georgia itself. In the Russian view, its intervention was an exercise in peace-enforcement, imposed upon a Georgian government that had begun combat

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<sup>26</sup> "NATO denies Georgia and Ukraine," BBC News, (4 April 2008),

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7328276.stm>, Accessed 20 February 2014.

<sup>27</sup> "Vtori etap uchenii 'Kavkaz-2008' pereshel v aktivnuiu fazu. MID Gruzii predostreg Rossiiskikh voennykh ot vtorzheniia," Newsru.com, 22 July 2008.

<sup>28</sup> "Pskovskie desantniki shturmuiut gery Severnoi Osetii," *Severnii Kavkaz*, (23 July 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Madina Shavlokhova and A'bert Eremian, "Gruzii i Rossiia obmenivaiutsia voennymi ucheniiami," *Gazeta*, (16 July 2008), p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Mikhail Tiurkin, "Gruzii i Iuzhnaia Osetiia na poroge voiny," *Nevskoe vremia*, (5 August 2008).

operations with no reference to its own exercises, which had ultimately increased tensions in the area.<sup>31</sup>

In September 2009, one year into the *New Look* transformation, a joint Russian and Belarusian exercise was conducted in and around Kaliningrad Oblast and included the organization of a defense against *hypothetical opponents*—which seemed to be NATO allies—attacking from Polish and Lithuanian territories and infiltrating Belarus.<sup>32</sup> It included an amphibious landing, involving ships from the Baltic, the Northern, and the Black Sea Fleets. Air defense operations were also featured. The total number of troops involved was about 12,500. They were supported by 220 tanks (470 armored fighting vehicles, AFVs), 230 self-propelled guns, 60 aircraft, and 40 helicopters. Then-president Dmitry Medvedev observed the amphibious assault and commented on the exercise's defensive character and contribution to strategic stability and deterrence. He also said that the exercises gave a good grade to the *New Look* transformation of the Armed Forces: "I believe that the experience and the outcomes achieved as a result of these exercises will be a very important point in the development of the new look of the Armed Forces."<sup>33</sup> Zapad 2009 did attract NATO's attention, with German fighters flying out of Lithuania to intercept Russian aircraft that came close to Baltic air space. The most noteworthy intercept involved an A-50 Long-Range Radar and Command and Control aircraft being escorted by two Su-27 fighters. When the fighters broke off from the A-50, they flew close enough to Finnish air space to cause the scramble of two

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<sup>31</sup> Ronald D. Asmus. *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. For the Russian view of the conflict see; Igor Dzhadan. *Piatidnevhaia voina: Rossiia pinuzhdaet k miru*. (Moscow: Izdatel'dstvo "Evropaa," 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Igor Stroeve, "'Zapad-2009': Gotovnost' nomer odin!," Rossiiskaia gazeta, (17 September 2009), <http://www.rg.ru/2009/09/17/ucheniya.html> Accessed 20 February 2014; and Jacob W, Kipp, "Ten Years of Anti-NATO Exercises by Russian and Belarusian Armed Forces.," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 6 No. 178, (29 September 2009).

<sup>33</sup> "Vystupitel'noe slovo na soveshchaniio o khode i provedenii operativno-strategicheskikh uchenii 'Zapad-2009' i ocherednykh zadachakh stroitel'stva Vooruzhennykh Sil," *Prezident Rossii*. (28 September 2009), <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/5602> Accessed 15 February 2014.

Finnish fighters.<sup>34</sup> Medvedev's positive assessment of Zapad 2009 was not shared by NATO specialists. By late 2010, the Russian press was following the discussions inside NATO about the concerns of the Baltic States regarding the Russian military threat following the Russian-Georgian War, via WikiLeaks. The Russian press spoke of a new Cold War in the Baltic.<sup>35</sup> WikiLeaks then published a cable on the assessment of Zapad 2009 and the Ladoga Exercises by Ivo Daadler, then US Permanent Representative on the NATO Council, which spoke of the limited military capabilities of Russian forces.

The exercises demonstrated that Russia has limited capability for joint operations with air forces, continues to rely on aging and obsolete equipment, lacks all-weather capability and strategic transportation means, is not able to conduct network centric warfare, has an officer corps lacking in flexibility, and has a manpower shortage.<sup>36</sup> Regarding the ability of Russian forces to conduct network-centric warfare, Daadler's opinion was shared by Russian military critics, who pointed to the progress made by US-NATO forces and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China in comparison with Russia.<sup>37</sup> More content about NATO's reaction to the exercises was picked up by the international press and then reported in the Russian press with such comments as: "The Russian cannot fight at night."<sup>38</sup> For the front line NATO members bordering Russia, its military weaknesses did not seem so evident. At the same time, NATO's disparaging assessment of Russian capabilities, had,

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<sup>34</sup> Craig Royle, "Pictures: German Eurofighters Intercept Russian Transport, Surveillance Aircraft," *Flightglobal*, (23 September 2009),

<http://www.flightglobal.com/news/articles/pictures-german-eurofighters-intercept-russian-transport-surveillance-332>, Accessed 15 February 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Andrei Terekhov, "Kholodnaia voina po Baltiiskomu stsensariiu," *Nezavimaaia gazeta*, (8 December 2010), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> "NATO-RUSSIA: NAC DISCUSSES RUSSIAN MILITARY EXERCISES," (23 November 2009), WikiLeaks, [https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09USNATO546\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09USNATO546_a.html), Accessed 15 February 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Igor Popov, "Setetsentricheskaia voina': Gotova li k nei Rossiia," *Voennaia istoriia i futurologiia*, <http://www.milresource.ru/NCW.html>, Accessed 3 May 2010; and A. E. Kondrat'ev, "problemnye voprosy issledovaniia novykh setetsentricheskikh kontseptsii vooruzhennykh sil vedushchikh zarubezhnykh stran," *Voennaia mysl'*, November 2009, pp. 61-74.

<sup>38</sup> Igor Tikhonenko, "WikiLeaks: Voennye ucheniia Rossii byli 'proval'nymi," *Golos-ameriki.ru*, (14 February 2011), <http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/wikileaks-russian-military-2011-02-14-116192429/207845.html>.

by early 2011, fed directly into the sharp domestic debate between champions of the *New Look* and its many opponents within the military and defense industry.

In September 2012, the General Staff conducted Kavkaz 2012, a strategic command post-staff exercise of the Southern Military District, which had several explicit points of focus. These included an assessment of the ability of the forces in the region to conduct combat operations in mountainous and steppe terrain, the evaluation of senior command leadership, and the testing of newly introduced C4ISR systems, which were part of the *New Look* transformation. Some observers labeled Kavkaz 2012 as a test of the entire *New Look* reform effort.<sup>39</sup> The local military press emphasized the combined arms nature of the maneuvers, especially the coordination of ground, air and naval forces in the Caucasian theatre of military actions, embracing it as a land bridge between Russia and the Middle East and bordered by the Black and Caspian Seas.<sup>40</sup> The Russian press stressed the testing of advanced precision-strike weapons, while denying that the maneuvers were in any way intended to serve as political pressure to influence the outcome of the upcoming Georgian parliamentary elections.<sup>41</sup>

In the summer of 2010, the General Staff conducted Vostok 2010, a particularly large exercise embracing all of Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East. This was an exercise embracing a number of operational scenarios against “a hypothetical opponent” undertaking military operations against Russian forces from the Kuril Islands, the Sea of Japan, the Ussuri Region, the Amur Valley, and the Trans-Baikal Region. A close examination of these scenarios raised the prospect that Russia does not have a single probable opponent in the Far East, but several. In the case of the defense of the Kuril Islands from amphibious assault, the probable opponent is Japan, which disputes Russia's claim to these islands. Anti-carrier operations at sea in 2010 could only be against the United States Navy, which kept carriers in the theater

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<sup>39</sup> Viktor Litovkin, “‘Kavkaz-2012’ eksamenuet reformu,” *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, (21 September 2012), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> S. Belogrud and N. Dem'ianenko, “‘Kavkaz-2012’: Glavnye manevry,” *Voennyi vestnik iuga Rossii*, (29 September 2012), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Viktor Khudoleev, “‘Kavkaz-2012’: Ne dopustit' spekulitsii,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, (21 September 2012). p. 3.

of operations. Refugee flows into the Ussuri region from across the Yalu River seemed connected to a possible political crisis or natural disaster in North Korea, and finally a defense against air attack on Khabarovsk and a ground invasion on the Chita-Irkutsk axis toward Lake Baikal, could only have been mounted by China's PLA.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, speaking about the deployment of two newly-organized brigades along the Russian-Chinese border on the Irkutsk-Chita Axis during the spring before Vostok 2010, Lieutenant-General Vladimir Valentinovich Chirkin, the commander of the Siberian Military District, stated that the brigades were deployed there to counter the presence of five PLA combined arms armies across the border. On the rationale for the deployment, Chirkin stated: "We are obligated to keep troops there because on the other side of the border are five Chinese armies and we cannot ignore that operational direction." Chirkin described the PLA forces across the border as composed of three divisions and ten tank, mechanized, and infantry brigades, which he considered as not little but also "not a strike force." As to the role of the new brigades, Chirkin put them as part of a deterrent force aimed as a friendly reminder to the PRC: "...despite the friendly relations with China, our army command understands that friendship is possible only with strong countries, that is, those [sic] who can quiet a friend down with a conventional or nuclear club."<sup>43</sup>

The Tsentr 2008 military exercises involved Russian forces from the Volga and Ural Military Districts and focused upon the threats of terrorism, attacks upon civilian institutions, arms smuggling and narco-trafficking. They also served as a test of a new concept for reducing the number of military districts and creating a single large Central Military District by combining the Volga and Ural Military Districts. This was done in October 2010. The General Staff saw this reform as allowing the Central Military District to play a key role as a pivot for Russian forces deploying to meet potential threats in the West, South and East, while playing a major role in counter-terrorism operations in Central Asia. In Tsentr 2011, a joint exercise involved forces from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as members of the Collective Security Treaty

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<sup>42</sup> Jacob W. Kipp, "Vostok 2010 and the Very Curious Hypothetical Opponent," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 7, Issue 123, (12 July 2010)

<sup>43</sup> "Russia Strengthens the Border with China," *Argumenty nedeli*, (4-10 March 2010).

Organization (CSTO). The concept of the exercise was based upon the response to a hypothetical local conflict in Central Asia but taking place within the context of a larger hypothetical global conflict.<sup>44</sup>

### *Zapad 2013: Context, Content and Implications*

Zapad 2013 came at a particularly critical time for the Russian military. In 2012, Vladimir Putin was elected to his third term as president of the Russian Federation. During his campaign, he had promised that his administration would invest in “smart defense” to guarantee the security of the Russian state against all threats.<sup>45</sup> Writing on defense issues as part of his election campaign, Putin's primary point was simple: “Being Strong: The Guarantee of National Security for Russia.” Putin’s “new threats” arose out of military-technical developments enhancing conventional military capabilities where they could call into question the deterrent power of strategic offensive nuclear weapons. Faced by the same challenges of austerity that confront NATO, Putin announced that his next term as president of Russia would be devoted to the transformation of the Russian Armed Forces to meet this new challenge. This would involve major investments to recast the Russian defense industry to meet the challenge of “weapons based on new physical principles” and involving warfare in space, information warfare, and cybernetics. Putin emphasized the defense capabilities of these new technologies. “Such hi-tech weapons systems will be comparable in effect to nuclear weapons but will be more ‘acceptable’ in terms of political and military ideology. In this sense, the strategic balance of nuclear forces will play a gradually diminishing role in deterring aggression and chaos.”<sup>46</sup> Zapad 2013, which was scheduled as the culminating exercise of the summer training season, would be one of the first indicators of the progress that was being made in the transformation of the

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<sup>44</sup> "Voennye ucheniia 'Tsentr-2011' proidut pod obshchim rukovodstvom prezidenta," Rossiiskaia gazeta, (12 September 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Jacob W. Kipp, “‘Smart’ Defense From New Threats: Future War From a Russian Perspective: Back to the Future After the War on Terror,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 1 (January 2014), pp. 36–62.

<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Byt’ sil’nymi: Garantii natsional’noi bezopasnosti dlia Rossii,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, (20 February 2012), <http://www.rg.ru/2012/02/20/putin-armiya.html>, Accessed 21 February 2012.

Russian armed forces since Putin's appointment of the new leadership of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff.

At the same time, Putin fired Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and the chief of the General Staff, Nikolai Makarov, in November 2012. This was in conjunction with charges of graft and corruption within the Ministry of Defense and against the backdrop of accusations that the entire effort to reform the Russian military according to the *New Look* had been a complete disaster. Putin appointed a new defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, and a new chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov. Minister Shoigu, a structural engineer by training and a native of Tuva, had risen to prominence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Appointed minister of civil defense and emergency situations by President Boris Yeltsin in 1994, he held that post until 2012, and in the process became one of the most popular government officials, recognized for his ability to deal with complex and difficult problems in a timely fashion. Leading one of Russia's power ministries, Shoigu was honored in 1999 as a *Hero of Russia* and was promoted to the rank of General of the Army in 2003. While involved in domestic politics, Shoigu's reputation was based on his managerial abilities and, in 2009, he was elected president of the prestigious Russian Geographic Society. In May 2012, Shoigu took over the position of Governor of Moscow Oblast and during his brief tenure there sought to address corruption associated with land deals. With the firing of Serdyukov, Putin appointed Shoigu to replace him in November 2012. Putin's mandate to Shoigu was to continue military transformation but to clean up the corruption, especially that which was associated with the Open Joint Stock Company, *Oboronservis*, with which Serdyukov and his mistress, Yevgeniya Vasilyeva, were involved.<sup>47</sup> Valery Gerasimov, the new Chief of the General Staff, represented a clear break with the past. General Nikolai Makarov had served as chief of the General Staff from 2008 to 2012, and had been in that post during the Russian-Georgian War of 2008, the very leadership of which had been so savaged by General Yuriy Baluevsky in 2012. Indeed, Makarov had sat as a member of the Security Council during that war. General Gerasimov, on the other hand, had spent much of the first decade of this century in the Caucasus as chief of staff of the 58<sup>th</sup> Army, then commander of

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<sup>47</sup> Viktor Litovkin, "Chrezvychainyi Shoigu," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, (9 November 2012), p. 1.

that Army and later as commander of the North Caucasus Military District. In that capacity, he had played a leading role in the Second Chechen War under Vladimir Putin.<sup>48</sup>

One of the first indications of the direction of the Ministry of Defense under Shoigu came in early February 2013. A surprise readiness test was announced in the Central Military District, covering a training exercise involving 7,000 men and about 40 aircraft. As the defense ministry announced the surprise test, it pointed out that this had been the first such test conducted by the General Staff in 20 years. Such tests meant that commanders had to actually roll out the units as they were, without time to correct problems in advance of the planned exercise. President Putin anxiously followed this readiness test. Shoigu kept up the practice. In March, President Putin himself visited a surprise readiness test for units of the Black Sea Fleet and the Southern Military District, involving naval, air and ground forces. In late May, Aerospace Defense Forces and Long-Range Military Transport Aviation were also subjected to a readiness test, which involved the deployment of these assets and the airlifting of combat troops and vehicles. In mid-July, Putin observed another surprise readiness exercise, but this time it was quite large, involving over 160,000 troops and 70 warships drawn from the Central and Far Eastern Military Districts and the Pacific Fleet. Once again, long-range transport aviation was involved, moving men and equipment into the theater.<sup>49</sup> Readiness exercises are associated with the requirement that deployed forces be ready to conduct combat operations immediately, moving rapidly and seamlessly from a period of imminent threat of war into the initial period of war, which is expected to have decisive impact on the course and outcome of the conflict. On the eve of Zapad 2013, Minister of Defense Shoigu once again returned to the theme of combat readiness, noting the changes made in command and control over the last year and the role of the exercises in testing under field conditions that had been achieved in this area.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ivan Safronov, "V Genshtabe staviat boevoi opyt," *Kommersant*, (9 November 2012), p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> "Vnezapnye proverki i ucheniia Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossii v 2013-2014 gody," *ITAR-TASS*, (3 March 2014), <http://itar-tass.com/info/1018067>, Accessed 4 March 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Aleksandr Tikhonov, "Zapad 2013': Gotovnost' polnaia," *Krasnaia zvezda*, (18 September 2013), p. 1

As the time for Zapad 2013 approached, there was increased concern among NATO members bordering the exercise area. The Russian and Belarusian defense ministries did not invite NATO observers, stating that the size of the exercise did not require advance notification. Remembering the scenario for Zapad 2009, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski had noted that the very location of this exercise raised concerns in Warsaw and other capitals.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad Oblast, where much of the Zapad exercise took place, is notably isolated from Russia proper, except by sea or by rail or road corridor across Belarus and Lithuania. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, this has created a complicated military environment, in which Kaliningrad became a fortress for Russian military planners in the midst of hostile territory. For Russia's Baltic neighbors, the militarization of this geographical region carried with it an implicit threat of Russian attack. Past memories of Soviet aggression reinforced this sentiment.

In this context, the Russian Ministry of Defense planned and conducted the scheduled Zapad 2013 exercise in September of that year. Zapad 2013 was treated by the Ministry of Defense and General Staff as a major exercise involving nine exercise areas located in Belarus and Kaliningrad Oblast and including ground, airborne, air force and naval units. A total of about 13,000 men participated in the exercises, including an amphibious operation along the Baltic Coast employing vessels from the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets.

Before the formal start of any exercise, there is the movement of forces from their area of deployment to the exercise areas. In the case of Russian Army units, this generally means a rail maneuver from Moscow and Nizhegorod oblasts to the training area in Belarus. In September 2013, this involved 20 trains transporting troops and equipment over 600 miles to the railhead in Belarus, from where they conducted a march maneuver to the training area.<sup>52</sup> Once deployed, the Joint Staff divided the exercise into two stages. The first

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<sup>51</sup> "Na manewry Zapad 2013 Rosja nie zaprasza obserwatorów NATO," *Polskie Radio*, (22 July 2013), <http://www.polskieradio.pl/75/921/Artykul/893060,Na-manewry-Zapad-2013-Rosja-nie-zaprasza-obserwatorow-NATO>, Accessed 20 February 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Aleksandr Tikhonov, " 'Zapad 2013': Vydvizhenie voisk," *Krasnaia zvesda*, (9 September 2013), p. 1.

stage of the joint exercise would address the problems of command and control in the deployment of forces, the isolation of the actions of the hypothetical illegal armed groups, and the build-up of the air force and air defense forces to protect important government and military facilities. The scenario assumed that the simulated illegal armed groups would enjoy external support for their operations. The second stage would also address command-and-control issues but in the context of military actions to stabilize the situation under conditions favorable to the security of the allied government. Interestingly, there was no mention of operational art in the discussion of the scenario, implying that the focus was on strategic and tactical command and control. The elimination of the intermediary headquarters between army headquarters and maneuver brigades, and the introduction of advanced C4ISR systems, was supposed to permit a flattening of the command and control system and increase tactical flexibility.<sup>53</sup>

One example of such a new command arrangement involved the employment of *spetsnaz* units during the exercise, which facilitated the joint employment of regular army units and the Ministry of Internal Affairs' *spetsnaz*. The command group for the special operations portion of Zapad 2013 included the Russian commander of the Ground Forces, Colonel-General Vladimir Chirkin, the chief of the Reconnaissance Directorate of the High Command of the Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Lieutenant-General Sergei Kutsov, and the chief of staff and first deputy commander of the Central Regional Command of the Troops of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, General-Major Igor Golloev. During the exercise, *spetsnaz* units dealt with enemy sabotage-reconnaissance groups, terrorists, and a hostile landing. The *spetsnaz* conducted a helicopter assault to block the hypothetical enemy's detachments and organized an ambush in the likely location of the appearance of terrorists, all while supported by air attacks, artillery fire and sorties of UAVs. The report of the exercise drew special attention to the role of the Smolensk 25<sup>th</sup> Spetsnaz Detachment "Mercury" of the Internal Troops, which had fought in the Second Chechen War, and employed new weapons and technology to isolate and disarm the terrorists.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Aleksandr Tikhonov, "Zapad 2013': Ot strategii k taktike," *Krasnaia zvezda*, (21 September 2013), p. 1

<sup>54</sup> Andrei Petrov and Mikhail Matiushenkov, "Spetsnaz likvidiroval bandgrupp," *Rabochii put'*, (26 September 2013).

Another aspect of Zapad 2013 that received prominence in the Russian media was the salvo firing of Iskander short-range ballistic missiles at a firing range in Leningrad Oblast. As the media report stated, the Iskander is a dual capable (conventional and nuclear armed) system with a range of 500 kilometers with the capacity for deep precision strikes, but hardly in keeping with fighting partisans and terrorists.<sup>55</sup> When, in December 2013, the German paper *Bild* raised the issue of the deployment of Iskander-M missiles to Kaliningrad as raising a nuclear threat to NATO's Baltic members, the Russian press presented the deployment in Kaliningrad as the inevitable response to the threat posed by the remaining nuclear bombs the US keeps in Europe and the potential threat to Russian strategic nuclear forces posed by a developing US-NATO ballistic missile defense system.

Presidents Putin and Lukashenko visited the Khmelevka firing range in Kaliningrad Oblast to witness a beach assault on the exercise scenario's illegal armed bands by Russian naval infantry and a Special forces unit from the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Putin reminded his audience of the five surprise readiness tests conducted by the General Staff during the previous year and stated: "As a result, we received a real picture of the condition of the armed forces and their combat potential. Together with the results of the analysis of the combat training, this will allow us to make corrections in the further development of the Armed Forces."<sup>56</sup> He went on to speak of a turning point that had been achieved in terms of the combat capabilities and combat readiness of the Armed Forces. That picture was one of a military in much better condition than it had been only a few years before with a much higher level of combat readiness. Outside observers agreed with this assessment but warned that it represented a capability that could be used to intervene against Russia's neighbors. The Swedish retired Major General Karlis Neretnieks judged that the capabilities demonstrated in the exercises showed considerable progress in addressing the problems raised by the war in Georgia. He pointed out that the exercise was much larger than the numbers stated in Russian sources—in his estimate, it involved as many as 45,000 troops. He warned that

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<sup>55</sup> "Voennye ucheniia raketnykh voisk i artillerii," Leningradskaia oblast', (22 September 2013), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KwaAUqllPc>.

<sup>56</sup> Aleksandr Tikhonov, "Zapad 2013': Pervye vyvody," *Krasnaia zvesda*, (27 September 2013), p. 1.

such enhanced capabilities as demonstrated in joint and inter-agency operations reflected improved command and control. He also noted the live employment of Iskander missiles and UAVs during the exercise. He warned that such capabilities, when joined with political intent, could pose threats not just to the Baltic States but to Russia's other neighbors:

Altogether we see a rapidly increasing Russian capability to mount large-scale, complex, military operations in its neighborhood, coordinated with operations in other areas. It would be a mistake to see this just a problem for the Baltic States. It should have implications for most of Russia's neighbors, and also for other parties interested in the security and stability in the Baltic Sea region.<sup>57</sup>

Following the conclusion of Zapad 2013, President Putin ordered another surprise inspection for combat readiness, selecting one of several test exercises developed by the General Staff. This time, Minister of Defense Shoigu and General Gerasimov were informed that the test would involve Russia's land-based ICBM and naval SLBM strategic offensive nuclear missile forces, long-range bomber forces, and aerospace defense forces as well as short-range Tochka and Iskander ballistic missiles. The readiness test concluded with the launch of two ICBMs (Topol-M and Voevoda); two SLBMs from SSBNs in the Barents Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk; S-300 and S 400 SAM firings against target drones and a simulated ballistic missile target, test firings of the Pantsir-C1 mobile, short-range anti-aircraft missile and gun system; and the launch of four Iskander and Tochka-U short-range ballistic missiles at various test-ranges.<sup>58</sup> That this particular readiness test embraced strategic offensive nuclear forces, aerospace defense forces, and tactical nuclear forces underscores the complex equation that Moscow practices regarding nuclear

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<sup>57</sup> "Opinion: Zapad 2013 -- Observations and Perspectives," *The Lithuania Tribune*, (15 October 2013), <http://www.lithuaniatribune.com/53648/opinion-Zapad-2013-observations-and-perspectives-201353648/>, Accessed 20 March 2014

<sup>58</sup> Andrei Efremov, "Kogda Armiia i Flot v dvizhenii," *Fail-RF: Ezhednevnaia elektronnaia gazeta* (18 July 2012), <http://file-rf.ru/context/2719>, Accessed 20 February 2014; "Protivoraketnaia sistema PRO uspeshno prrazilo uslovnnuiu tsel', imitiruiushchuiu ballisticheskuiu raketu," *Radio Ekho Moskvy: Novosti*, (30 October 2013), <http://echo.msk.ru/news/1188116-echo.html>, Accessed 20 February 2014.

deterrence, conventional warfighting, and the presumed employment of non-strategic nuclear forces as a means to de-escalate an on-going conflict.

Those words certainly ring true today. Despite the supposed Minsk Two ceasefire between the Ukrainian military and the combined Russian-proxy units in Donbas, Russia's forces continue to occupy Crimea and thousands of soldiers remain deployed along the eastern frontier of Ukraine—in addition to those clandestinely operating within the Donbas war zone. Meanwhile, dozens of Russian formations are engaged in training exercises every few months, including ground, naval, air, and missiles forces across Russia<sup>59</sup>—most recently, in the large-scale Tsentr 2015 exercise that took place in mid-September 2015.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, the persistent concentration of Russian forces massed along Ukraine's eastern border sustain fears in Kyiv and Washington of imminent conflict precisely because the continuation of such concentrations after the end of military exercises has, in the past, served as the basis for subsequent large-scale combat operations. Moreover, the presence of *spetsnaz* units in occupied Crimea raises concerns over whether such units might be used to destabilize southern or eastern Ukraine and, in the chaos, provide the justification for another overt Russian military intervention. This leaves us with the most serious challenge to peace and stability in Europe since the end of the Cold War.

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<sup>59</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, "Desiatki soedinenii Rossiiskopi armii okhvacheny voennymi ucheniiami," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, (21 March 2014), <http://www.rg.ru/2014/03/21/ucheniya-site-anons.html>, Accessed 22 March 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Roger McDermott, "Tsentr 2015: Testing Mobility and Strategic Messaging," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Volume 12, Issue 170, (22 September 2015), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=44402&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=b0900e84f5a65aa1a3605d57aa0b3525#.VgHI5pfMK94](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=44402&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=b0900e84f5a65aa1a3605d57aa0b3525#.VgHI5pfMK94), Accessed 22 September 2015.

## Author Biographies

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**Stephen Blank** is a Senior Fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington. From 1989 to 2013, he was a Professor of Russian National Security Studies at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College in Pennsylvania. Dr. Blank has been Professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute since 1989. In 1998–2001 he was Douglas MacArthur Professor of Research at the War College.

He has published over 900 articles and monographs on Soviet/Russian, U.S., Asian, and European military and foreign policies, testified frequently before Congress on Russia, China, and Central Asia, consulted for the CIA, major think tanks and foundations, chaired major international conferences in the USA and abroad In Florence, Prague, and London, and has been a commentator on foreign affairs in the media in the United States and abroad. He has also advised major corporations on investing in Russia and is a consultant for the Gerson Lehrmann Group.

He has published or edited 15 books focusing on Russian foreign, energy, and military policies and on International Security in Eurasia. His most recent book is *Russo-Chinese Energy Relations: Politics in Command*, London: Global Markets Briefing, 2006. He has also published *Natural Allies? Regional*

Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2005.

Dr. Blank is also the author of a study of the Soviet Commissariat of Nationalities, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin's Commissariat of Nationalities*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994 and the co-editor of *The Soviet Military and the Future*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992.

Prior to this appointment Dr. Blank was Associate Professor for Soviet Studies at the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education of Air University at Maxwell AFB. He also held the position of 1980–86: Assistant Professor of Russian History, University of Texas, San Antonio, 1980–86, and Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian history, University of California, Riverside, 1979–80.

Dr. Blank's M.A. and Ph.D. are in Russian History from the University of Chicago. His B.A is in History from the University of Pennsylvania.

**Jörgen Elfving** is a former army officer who has worked with issues related to Russia both during and after his military career. In 2003–2004, he was assistant military attaché in Riga and he pursued Slavic studies and Russian language studies at the University of Uppsala and Stockholm. Presently, he is engaged in a research project on Russian Military Capabilities at the Swedish National Defense University.

**Dr. Pauli Järvenpää**, a former Finnish diplomat and a senior government official, joined the Tallinn-based International Centre for Defense Studies (ICDS) as a Senior Research Fellow on May 1, 2013. At ICDS, he focuses on the security of the Baltic Sea and Nordic region and on issues related to NATO, the EU and transatlantic cooperation, as well as on the security and development of Afghanistan. Ambassador Järvenpää most recently served as the Finnish Ambassador to Afghanistan (2010–2013). Before that he was Director General of the Defense Policy Department at the Finnish Ministry of Defense (2002–2010) and the Defense Advisor at the Mission of Finland to

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**Jacob W. Kipp** retired from federal service in September 2009, and is currently an Adjunct Professor at the University of Kansas and an occasional contributor on Eurasian security for The Jamestown Foundation. He received his PhD. in Russian History from the Pennsylvania State University in 1970. From 1971 to 1985, he taught Russian and Military History at the Kansas State University. In January 1986, he joined the newly founded Soviet Army Studies Office (SASO) at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, as a senior analyst. In 1991, SASO became the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO). In 2003, Dr. Kipp became director of FMSO and served in that capacity until October 2006, when he joined the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) as Deputy Director. He has published extensively on Russian and Soviet naval and military history. Topics have included Russian naval reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Soviet naval history and analysis, operational art in theory and practice, and foresight and forecasting in Russian and Soviet military affairs. From 1992 to 2001, he served as the US editor of *European Security*. His publications include: “Military Theory, Strategy, and Praxis,” co-authored with Dr. Lester Grau, *Military Review*, (March–April 2011), and “Russian Military Doctrine: Past, Present, and Future,” in: Stephen J. Blank, *Russian Military Politics and Russia’s 2010 Defense Doctrine*, (Carlisle Barracks: PA: U. S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2011).

**Dr. Peter A. Mattsson** heads the research project “Russian Armed Forces 2020/2030” at the Swedish National Defense College (2011–2017). The project has been focused on regular warfare. Dr. Mattsson has also studied “The Second Lebanon War” (2006) and “The Five Days Caucasian War” (2008), and he has produced a total of 15 research reports. His recently published reports include “Comprehensive Warfare—Changed Military Concepts, Capabilities and Operational Art of War” (2013), “The Russian Armed Forces—Adapted to New Operational Concepts in a Multipolar World” (2014), and “The New Generation of Russian Warfare” (2015).

**Liudas Zdanavičius** is a lecturer at The General Jonas Zemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. He is also a researcher at the Center for Security and Strategic Studies at the National Defense Academy of Latvia. He holds an MA in international relations and diplomacy from the Vilnius University's Institute of International Relations and Political Science and is currently writing his PhD dissertation on Russian foreign policy. Liudas Zdanavičius has authored and co-authored many books, scientific studies, articles and papers about Russian internal and foreign policy, defense industry, development of the Kaliningrad region, security of the Baltic Sea region and other topics. His research interests focus on the national security and foreign policy of the Russian Federation and other post-Soviet countries.

# Russia's Zapad 2013 Military Exercise

**ZAPAD 2013** was a wide-scale military exercise carried out by the Russian and Belarusian military forces in September 2013. The joint maneuvers, which were held in Belarus and western Russia, simulated an incursion by foreign-backed "terrorist" groups originating from the Baltic States. This exercise—involving tens of thousands of personnel and hundreds of vehicles and pieces of military equipment—received a great deal of attention in the Baltic States, Poland and Finland, but passed almost unnoticed in the West.

*Russia's Zapad 2013 Exercise: Lessons for Baltic Regional Security* analyzes in deep and well-researched detail different aspects of Zapad 2013 and how this exercise relates to Russia's military posture and the security environment in Europe's East. The included authors represent a broad range of viewpoints, spanning the United States, the Nordic countries and the Baltic States, as well as government, military and academia. This assembled cross-section of analytical defense and security expertise thus provides an unmatched and comprehensive review of a Russian military exercise with direct implications for NATO defense planning, but which nonetheless passed by with limited commentary in the United States and many of the Alliance's Western European members.



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